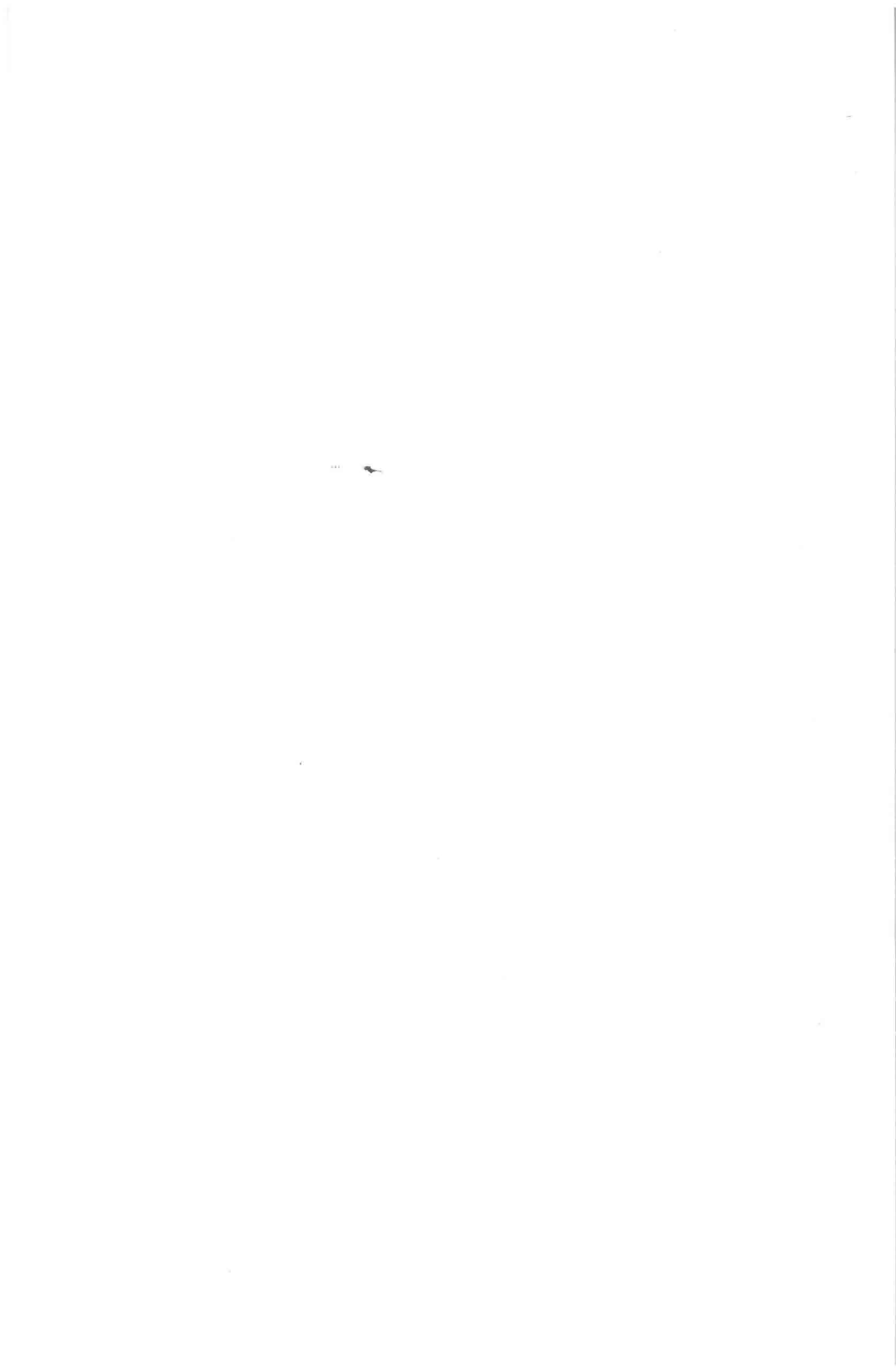


GERALD C. EDIGER

Crossing the Divide:

Language Transition Among
Canadian Mennonite Brethren
1940-1970

Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies
Winnipeg, MB



***CROSSING THE DIVIDE:
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By

Gerald C. Ediger

Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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***AT THAT TIME
I WILL CHANGE THE SPEECH
OF ALL THE PEOPLES
TO A PURE SPEECH,
THAT ALL OF THEM
MAY CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD
AND SERVE HIM WITH ONE ACCORD.***

Zephaniah 3.9

Contents

1. Introduction: The Contours of the Divide	1
2. Prologue to Confrontation	11
<i>The Kanadier Come to the Brink of Change</i>	12
<i>The Arrival of the Russländer</i>	16
<i>First Attempts to "Regulate the Situation"</i>	25
3. Confrontation Engaged.....	39
<i>Passions are Defined</i>	39
<i>The Committee for the German Language</i>	42
<i>Conflict and Threatening Alienation</i>	47
<i>Bilingualism Re-defined and Alienation Confirmed</i>	52
4. Hope, Disillusionment and Surrender	65
<i>The Watershed Year, 1952</i>	65
<i>Still Attempting to "Regulate the Situation"</i>	72
<i>Paying the Price of Transition</i>	79
5. Winkler Case Study: To the Brink of Schism	91
<i>Initial Accommodation and Accelerating Change</i>	92
<i>Gathering Resistance</i>	95
<i>Denial, Suppression and Manipulation</i>	102
<i>To the Brink of Schism</i>	109
6. North End-Elmwood Case Study: Resisting the Tide of Change	121
<i>The Language Issue Takes Shape</i>	122
<i>Incremental Bilingualism</i>	128
<i>Frustration, Alienation and Malaise</i>	138
<i>Staving Off Linguistic Segregation</i>	145
7. South End-Portage Avenue Case Study:	
From Denial to Suppression	155
<i>Tensions Defined</i>	156
<i>Achieving the Minimum of Bilingualism</i>	166
<i>Bilingualism Reluctantly Expanded</i>	172
<i>Schism</i>	178
<i>Suppression Fails Again</i>	185

8. Conclusion	193
<i>The Scope and Sequence</i>	
<i>of Mennonite Brethren Language Transition</i>	194
<i>Factors Contributing to Language Transition</i>	201
Sources and Bibliography	209
<i>Primary Sources</i>	209
<i>Selected General Bibliography</i>	211
Abbreviations and Endnotes	215
Glossary	237

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Gerald C. Ediger
Thanksgiving, October 2001

Introduction: The Contours of the Divide

The Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church was beginning to settle into its new location on Henderson Highway in Winnipeg in June of 1954. Wanting to reach out to its new neighbourhood, the church planned its usual vacation Bible school for the coming summer. In setting out its guiding policies the congregation voted to conduct two half-day vacation Bible schools simultaneously, one in German for the children of the congregation, and one in English for community children. This segregated approach reflected an attempt to bridge a tension in the Elmwood congregation. How could the congregation reconcile its need to protect its ethno-religious identity and its equally strong desire to reach out to its non-Mennonite neighbourhood?

In his introduction to *Bridging Troubled Waters: The Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Twentieth Century*, Paul Toews outlines some of the stresses and adjustments that challenged North American Mennonite Brethren in the middle of the twentieth century. One of these was the tension, often experienced by ethno-religious communities, between a need for protective boundaries and a revitalizing centre.¹ Consistent with long established Mennonite practice, Mennonite Brethren felt the need to conserve and protect their historic identity in a new, strange and pluralistic society by hedging their congregations with strong boundaries. At the same time the creative and vital centre of Mennonite Brethren religious life, especially in the generation growing up in the new world, centred on a theology of missional activism. This core conviction of Mennonite Brethren could only be validated by reaching out beyond the boundaries of identity maintenance into their wider non-Mennonite communities.

Among the various challenges faced by the Mennonite Brethren Church in the middle of the twentieth century was the tension of faith and culture. In Canada, this issue was dominated by the language question. How would Canadian Mennonite

Brethren respond to the realities of a German-speaking ethno-religious group being confronted by the pressures of English-speaking Canadian society? This study describes how Canadian, and then particularly Manitoba, Mennonite Brethren went through a painful process of exchanging German for English as their primary language of religious discourse and nurture. This language transition was complicated by the nature of Mennonite identity, grounded as it is in religion as well as in ethnicity. The profound interconnection of religion, language and identity invested the course of language transition with deeply felt passion and anxiety. In the end, the tension was resolved in an altered identity with the boundary markers of language and ethnicity becoming increasingly subordinate to more purely religious considerations of Mennonite Brethren identity.

When the tension surrounding the language question is examined more closely, several divisions, both actual and potential are discernable. One divide, of course, was linguistic. The language question represented a watershed of attitude and perspective both in the Mennonite Brethren Conference and in local congregations. A second contour of this divide was generational. Those defending the German language were thought of as conservative and older. On the other side, those promoting the adoption of English were often younger, and thought of themselves as more progressive. A third contour of division was more subtle. Behind the language question lay the divide between congregation and community, identity and mission.

Crossing the divide between German and English did not resolve all of the tensions thrown into relief by the language question. In one respect, however, a greater sense of integration was achieved as the Mennonite Brethren Church demonstrated the capacity to change. Rather than being deliberately unilingual, closed and inwardly focused, Canadian Mennonite Brethren congregations are now more open and inclusive of diverse cultures, ethnic groups and languages. In 2000 the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches had 34,000 members meeting in more than 220 congregations.² Sunday morning would find Canadian Mennonite Brethren believers worshipping

in a wide variety of languages including English, German, Russian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese, Farsi and Arabic.

Such multilingualism stands in stark contrast to the situation in 1914. Then, four years after the Canadian congregations first organized into a district conference, there were 1,500 Canadian Mennonite Brethren believers³ consisting mainly of Russian-Mennonite immigrants or their descendants. These were Mennonites who had first settled in the American great plains and then moved north. Apart from a small Russian-speaking minority in Saskatchewan,⁴ their religious language was solidly and avowedly German. In the 1940s, 50s and 60s, however, Canadian Mennonite Brethren exchanged German for English as their primary language of religious usage. This was the first step in the transformation of a unilingual German speaking religious community in 1910 into a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic denomination by century's end. The purpose of this study is to trace and analyze the process that made such a change possible.

By focusing on language transition the following analysis seeks to enhance the historical understanding of Canadian Mennonite Brethren as an ethno-religious group. During the 1880s Mennonite Brethren missionaries from the American mid-west moved north into southern Manitoba and the first Canadian Mennonite Brethren congregation was founded in 1888.⁵ In the ensuing decades, the culture brought by Mennonite Brethren from their former life in southern Russia was adapted to Canadian ways in many respects, but the Brethren were determined to retain the central role played by the German language in their religious practice and expression. Nevertheless, the issue of language retention or change became a volatile question embroiling the foremost councils of the church as well as the leaders and members of local congregations. It is this reluctance to abandon High German as the language of Mennonite Brethren piety and religious practice that accounts for the interest and significance of this study.

This issue touched Mennonite Brethren identity at its

deepest level. The question of Mennonite identity has been a matter of widespread interest in the last two decades, and much work has been done across a range of academic disciplines to explore the implications of modern and post-modern culture for Mennonite self-understanding.⁶ The present study does not attempt to employ this literature in a systematic fashion, but seeks rather to acquire a broad historical perspective on the underlying process of language shift as experienced by Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Thus, the major aim of this analysis is a detailed historical examination of how average Mennonite Brethren believers and their leaders confronted issues of culture, faith and identity while struggling through the question of religious and linguistic continuity and change.

Mennonite religion and culture was examined by Paul Toews in 1986, as he outlined three perspectives on the relationship between North American Mennonite Brethren and their surrounding culture in the twentieth century. Both historical and typological in conception, these approaches correspond roughly to three periods: before World War I, followed by the decades after World War I, and finally, the period after about 1970.⁷ In the first period, Mennonite Brethren were expansive, reaching out to the surrounding culture from the security of their rural ethno-religious communities. Then, becoming increasingly subject to cultural encroachment from their more numerous neighbours, they became separative, throwing up a hedge against anything that appeared to threaten their essential religious identity. Finally, in the latest stage, some Mennonite Brethren have become assimilative to the point of rejecting any overt linkage between faith and culture.

The subject of language transition among Canadian Mennonite Brethren belongs naturally to the phase after World War I, but the literature that has stimulated interest in the subject began to emerge in the 1980s. In 1986 linguistic anthropologist and missions consultant Jacob Loewen presented the paper "The German Language, Culture and Faith"⁸ at a conference discussing the "Dynamics of Faith and Culture in Mennonite Brethren History." He argued from a social science point of view that

“while MBs [Mennonite Brethren] were stating their ideals of separation from the world in biblical and spiritual terms, in reality, the expected evidence of such a separated life were fidelity to the German language and visible conformity to group behavioral mores of the closed communities in which they lived.”⁹ He also suggested, based on a reading of John A. Toews’ standard history of the Mennonite Brethren,¹⁰ that using language as a deliberate barrier against cultural assimilation was a Mennonite habit going back four centuries involving three different linguistic configurations.¹¹

The issue of ethnicity and Mennonite Brethren, however, was not only a matter for scholarly debate; it drew the attention of denominational leaders as well. In 1987 John H. Redekop, commissioned by the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference, published *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren*.¹² In it he concluded that “Mennonites in contemporary Canada constitute an ethnic group” and that “in addition to its religious meaning, ‘Mennonite’ also refers to a specific ethnicity.”¹³ Included in his three-part solution to the Mennonite “ethnic problem”¹⁴ was the proposal that Mennonite Brethren change their name to “Canadian Conference of Evangelical Anabaptist Churches.”¹⁵ The study led to a symposium on faith and ethnicity among Mennonite Brethren convened that same year.¹⁶

The present study sets aside the considerations of social theory and documents the actual process by which Mennonite Brethren abandoned their linguistic separatism and translated their religious life into everyday Canadian idiom. The strategy for this project involves an inductive methodology yielding detailed case studies of language transition in three local congregations, and a profile of denominational language change based on Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference proceedings.

This investigation was based on several assumptions and deliberate limitations. First, it has been limited, for the most part, to the period from 1940 to 1970. This is not to imply that the Mennonite Brethren transition from German to English was accomplished in these thirty years. Rather, this period represents

the time when most of the changes took place. The displacement of German by English at the Conference level is taken as substantially accomplished when English became the official working language of the conference and the primary language of record for the conference. In the congregational context, the process of language transition is considered complete when the main Sunday morning worship service has become unilingually English. A further assumption is that religion and language are valid expressions of ethnicity and important dimensions of "Volk" or peoplehood.¹⁷ The phenomenon generally referred to in this study as language transition is the same as that referred to by sociologists as language shift.¹⁸

The study has been sharply focused in terms of methodology and source material, and draws many of its findings from comparative case studies of language shift drawn from the minutes of congregational leadership council meetings and membership meetings of three congregations. The choice of Winkler, North End-Elmwood and South End-Portage Avenue was strategic. Winkler was selected because it represents the first Canadian Mennonite Brethren congregation and serves as a congregation with a rural history pre-dating the *Russländer*. North End and South End commended themselves because of their age and size. Taken together, the three congregations constitute a significant aggregate proportion of the Mennonite Brethren population in Manitoba which itself represents a major concentration of the larger Canadian Mennonite population. A further consideration was the quality and completeness of congregational records. Other premier Mennonite Brethren congregations such as Main Centre in Saskatchewan, Coaldale in Alberta, and Yarrow in British Columbia, would have been suitable and instructive cases but their records were not as complete as those selected. Admittedly, this selection has introduced one bias the significance of which could be the subject of further investigation. This rises from the fact that within the period of study the majority of Mennonite Brethren were still rural while two of the three cases studied here are urban. The degree to which urban or rural location was a factor in Mennonite Brethren language shift remains

to be tested.

The case study material has been augmented in four ways. Wherever available, weekly church bulletins have served as a very useful diary of how language-related-developments worked themselves into congregational life. Secondly, a careful reading of the annual minutes of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and its predecessor, the Northern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, provides the case studies with an essential introductory context and serves as an important base for broader comparison. Thirdly, a complete set of annual congregational statistical reports for the entire Canadian Conference covering the years 1946 to 1966 has made it possible to construct a broad profile of language use and change at the congregational level for the denomination as a whole. This profile has augmented the present analysis with pertinent examples and illustrations.

The fourth source of important material is the Mennonite Brethren press. It was not the habit of Mennonite Brethren secretaries to record the details of debates conducted at Conference conventions or in membership meetings. Substantive elements of the debate about language have been drawn, therefore, from periodicals related to the Mennonite Brethren.

A further limitation of this study is that congregational minutes, official conference proceedings and denominational periodicals are under the control of established and primary opinion leaders. This resulted in the pro-German side of the debate receiving a disproportionate share of exposure as compared to the pro-English side. No attempt has been made in this study to include oral sources. Such additional effort might be an effective way to clarify the pro-English side, but this study deliberately focused on the documentary and institutional record and as such may serve as a reliable control on any subsequent oral investigation.

Thus, this study is a documentary institutional history depending on the official records of the conferences involved and their publications and on three selected case studies. The narrative analysis presented here and the validity of the factors

elicited from it remain to be tested by additional research avenues. Adding a dimension of oral history, for example, would do much to confirm or qualify the suggestions made in the present study. There are also rich possibilities for comparative work. For example, how similar or different would a parallel study of language transition among American Mennonite Brethren be with the story presented here? Moreover, what could be learned if this analysis of Canadian Mennonite Brethren language transition were placed along side similar studies of other Mennonite conferences in North America?

Finally, for the reader not familiar with Mennonite Brethren polity, a few explanatory notes will be helpful. Of first importance is the fact that the years from 1940 to 1960 encompass the initial shift of Mennonite Brethren congregational leadership from multiple ministers who were ordained but not necessarily formally trained, towards a professionally trained and paid full-time pastorate. For the period in view, ordination was extended, at the initiative of the local congregation, to both deacons and ministers (always male), and was considered to be for life. These comprised the leadership of the congregation until, with the professional pastorate, a more lay-oriented form of church council was slowly introduced.

Local congregations viewed themselves as linked together in the form of a *Bund* or conference existing in three interlocking spheres differentiated by geography and the scope and scale of the common Mennonite Brethren projects and agencies they superintended. Thus, the General Conference for North America had oversight of foreign missions; the Northern District (later the Canadian Conference) developed programs in education and later in publications, while provincial conferences attended to so-called home missions, Bible schools and more regional concerns. The polity of the entire structure was strongly congregational, and delegates from local congregations gathered in convention at regular intervals to appoint conference leaders and reach consensus on matters of common concern.

At the local level, membership was granted on the basis of believer's baptism upon confession of personal conversion

and the witness of the larger membership to the integrity of the candidate's piety and personal deportment. Participation in membership meetings was restricted to formal members,¹⁸ and communion was restricted to baptized believers in good standing with their local congregation.

Mennonite Brethren worship had no formal liturgy but the impress of a common tradition could be seen in a recognizable similarity of key elements. The sermon, or often two sermons, was the principal focus of the worship experience. These would typically run to about forty-five minutes and featured detailed expository treatment of an extended biblical text. It was taken for granted that all worshippers of suitable age would bring their Bibles and follow the progress of the sermon in their own text. The *Gebetstunde*, a time of extemporaneous prayer, was a second important feature of Sunday morning worship. This time, which could extend to fifteen minutes or even longer, was frequently led by a lay member of the congregation (always male) who would invite impromptu prayers by lay men and women. A third vital element of Mennonite Brethren worship was hymn singing and choral music, seriously rendered in rich four-part harmony by both the congregation and a church choir. While Mennonite Brethren family life and educational endeavours were frequently regarded as the primary venues of German language training, these efforts were not for their sake alone. Rather, inculcating the German mother tongue at home and school was vital to preserving the cross-generational bonding of Mennonite Brethren in common worship and incorporating the next generation into the worshipping community.

The confrontation of German and English in the context of Mennonite Brethren religious experience was a trauma touching every member of the Mennonite Brethren community during the 1940s, 50s and 60s, including the present writer. Like many Canadian ethnic Mennonite Brethren from this period, I can readily relate a personal anecdote about language transition. Having grown up in a Mennonite Brethren congregation in southern Ontario in the fifties and sixties, I can recall a snippet of childhood humour. Frequently, the following question was

jokingly posed, "What language does God speak?" to which one replied, "Why German, of course!" When pressed with, "How do you know God speaks German?" the respondent came back with, "Oh, the Bible says so. Haven't you read in Genesis that when God was walking in the Garden of Eden he called out, *"Adam, wo bist du?!"* ("Adam, where are you?!"). The joke was always performed in English; even children were somehow aware of the tension with which their elders were struggling. Mennonite Brethren experience at mid-century cannot be adequately understood without reference to this ubiquitous fact of immigrant religious life. It is hoped that the following will help to augment the folk-memory of this phenomenon with historical documentation and appropriate analysis.

Prologue to Confrontation

In the thirty years after World War II, Canadian Mennonite Brethren struggled through a linguistic revolution that produced a fundamental re-orientation of belief, attitude, thought and practice with far-reaching consequences for their self-understanding and sense of identity. By the mid-1940s, as Mennonite Brethren confronted the possibility that they would soon worship in English, they were part of a much larger complex of North American Russian Mennonites with distinct features derived from two large Russian Mennonite migrations to North America dating from the 1870s and the 1920s.

The dynamic of language change among Canadian Mennonite Brethren during and after World War II emerges out of the interplay of several subgroups of North American Mennonites. The nature of these groupings is rooted in the history of Mennonite migration from Russia to, and within, North America between 1873 and 1930. Mennonites settling in Manitoba during the first migration of 1873 to 1884 came to be known as *Kanadier*. Originally there were no Mennonite Brethren among these, but a large contingent of Mennonite Brethren did settle in the United States, becoming *Amerikaner* Mennonite Brethren. During the 1880s, these *Amerikaner* Mennonite Brethren undertook mission efforts among the *Kanadier* Mennonites in southern Manitoba with the result that some became Mennonite Brethren "*Kanadier* converts."¹ In the period from 1884 to 1923 some *Amerikaner* Mennonite Brethren moved to Saskatchewan and within the Canadian context, these have been termed "*late Kanadier*." A second wave of Russian Mennonite migration between 1923 and 1930 brought those now known as the *Russländer*. Mennonite Brethren were well-represented among these. By the 1930s then, there were three groups of Canadian Mennonite Brethren: a small group descended from *Kanadier* converts in Manitoba, a sizable minority of late *Kanadier* Mennonite Brethren in Saskatchewan, and a dominant majority of *Russländer*

Mennonite Brethren spread from Ontario to British Columbia.

By 1940 the story of language transition among Mennonite Brethren discloses two contrasting features. First, the American Mennonite Brethren were making their transition earlier and with less trauma than their Canadian counterparts. Second, among the Canadians themselves the *Kanadier*, and especially the late *Kanadier* of Saskatchewan, were more open to the English language compared to the more recently arrived *Russländer*. Thus, while Canadian Mennonite Brethren exhibited concern about the language question before the arrival of the *Russländer*, they were less inclined to undertake strenuous measures to ensure the survival of German and seemed slowly to be approaching the brink of change.

The Kanadier Come to the Brink of Change

The original language of Russian Mennonites had been Dutch; but beginning in the 1530s Dutch Mennonites escaped persecution by fleeing to the Vistula Delta area around Danzig. Here they gradually exchanged their Dutch for German and they retained German as their principal language until their arrival in North America. In 1789 some of these Mennonites began emigrating to South Russia where they developed a sophisticated commonwealth of colonies. Russia's drive for modernization after the Crimean War of 1854-56 had important implications for Russian Mennonites. Perceiving that their independence was threatened by St. Petersburg's new social and military policies, one third of the Russian Mennonite population grasped the promise of land and opportunity in the American and Canadian mid-west and launched the first great Russian-Mennonite migration to North America in 1874. The principal language of these émigrés was German, with all social, religious, intellectual and commercial life being conducted in either the common Low German of the street or the more cultured and refined High German of the church and the classroom.

Religious schism had fractured Russian Mennonites into

several groups by 1870. The two largest groups were the Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Brethren who had seceded in 1860.² Mennonite Brethren settled exclusively in the USA in the 1870s, locating in Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota and South Dakota. Other Mennonites established themselves in both southern Manitoba and the American mid-west. By the 1880s a few Mennonite Brethren missionaries had crossed the border to work among their fellow Mennonites in Manitoba. The first Mennonite Brethren congregation in Canada was founded in Winkler, Manitoba in 1888. This congregation became the parent congregation of Mennonite Brethren *Kanadier* converts. Before the turn of the century *Amerikaner* Mennonite Brethren were also settling in Saskatchewan and with their change in location may be designated as "late *Kanadier*."³

As all newly emigrated Russian Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren faced a fresh challenge of cultural assimilation in North America where Mennonite ethno-religious identity was far more exposed to English assimilation than it had been to Russian in their old-world colonies. This vulnerability was keenly felt in education and, largely, it was in that arena that the linguistic battle for the next Mennonite generation was fought. Mennonite Brethren had two primary settings in which to cultivate the German language—the Sunday school and the day school. Sunday school was not the primary vehicle for systematic religious instruction for Mennonite Brethren but rather a venue for children's evangelization. Thus, formal religious training, now also being exploited as a vehicle for German instruction, remained the province of the day school as it had been in Russia.⁴

The Manitoba Public Schools Act of 1890 provided Mennonites with a chance to retain their vital emphasis on *Deutsch und Religion*⁵ within a bicultural public school setting. Similar provisions were granted in Saskatchewan after 1905. Mennonite Collegiate Institute was established at Gretna, Manitoba in 1889. This was a high school and teacher-training institute designed to help bridge the gap between the Mennonite community and Canadian society through bicultural and bilingual schooling. The intent was to preserve *Deutsch und Religion*

while also equipping youth for new opportunities in Canadian society.⁶ By 1905 Saskatchewan Conference of Mennonites had also started the Rosthern German-English Academy.⁷ Late *Kanadier* Mennonite Brethren soon followed suit with a school conforming to their own particular interests. In 1910, at the first convention of the newly organized Northern District [Mennonite Brethren] Conference,⁸ chairman David Dyck proposed a Mennonite Brethren school to provide youth with biblical instruction in German, and within two years the Herbert Bible School was founded. The vision of its first leader, John F. Harms, was to equip students for Sunday school work, evangelism and work as German language teachers. In addition, Bible school students intending to train as district schoolteachers would be equipped to supply whatever German instruction the government allowed.⁹

While the purpose of the Herbert Bible School was to promote all that Mennonite Brethren held dear, it also opened the door to influences from English-speaking conservative Christianity. Founding teacher Harms had attended Nepperville Evangelical Seminary in Illinois for two years and chose Moody Bible Institute and The Bible Institute of Los Angeles as models for the new school. Thus, the Herbert school blended the evangelical fundamentalism of the revivalist tradition with the pietism and biblicism of the Mennonite Brethren. Its aims were to deepen the spiritual life of its students, to help them become good church members and to help retain the German language.¹⁰ The concern to protect the linkage between German and faith, however, did not mean that students should not become proficient in English, nor did it preclude ministry to English-speaking non-Mennonites. Harms included English grammar in an otherwise German curriculum; he also conducted English weeknight worship services for the *Engländer*¹¹ in the Herbert area who did not have any religious services.¹² The example of the Herbert Bible School serves to illustrate an early trend among Mennonite Brethren late *Kanadier*. While desiring to retain their German heritage, they were also open to the larger world of English Evangelicalism and were prepared to use the English language in outreach and ministry from the very beginning. In the long run,

the latter undercut the former, and this early accommodation to English would become a marked tendency among Mennonite Brethren in Saskatchewan.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, however, North American Mennonite Brethren leaders did not welcome signs that their German heritage was already slipping away. An anonymous *Zionsbote* columnist, writing under the heading "*Belehrendes*," complained that writing about the need to retain the German language was a thankless task. So many Mennonite Brethren were ready to abandon their German heritage.¹³ This readiness to jettison things German became more pronounced as Europe, the British Commonwealth and the United States confronted Germany at war. In Canada wartime conditions understandably exacerbated the clash between Mennonite and Anglo-Saxon culture leading to legislation making English the sole language of instruction in Manitoba and Saskatchewan schools. Among Mennonite Brethren some considered the struggle against Anglicization all but lost, and others apparently considered the battle not worth fighting. J. W. Neufeld, writing in the *Zionsbote* in 1920, judged Mennonite Brethren to be losing their God-given right to *Deutsch und Religion* rapidly by gross neglect. The faith was sure to suffer, he said, and children were being lost.¹⁴ Evidence from the Northern District corroborates Neufeld's pessimism as district leaders failed in a three-year drive between 1921 and 1923 to create boards of education in every local congregation and make them accountable for religious and language instruction in their communities.¹⁵

As Mennonites dealt with the consequences of abandoning their closed communities, where identity had been secured by ethno-religious separatism, their new-found vulnerability amid the choices of modern society confronted them with fundamental questions. Could they sustain authentic Mennonite faith and community without an ethnic solidarity safeguarded by pervasive loyalty to the German language? Did they care that their traditional Mennonite identity was seriously at risk? Did they even recognize the danger? Later developments confirm that Mennonite Brethren *Kanadier* J. W. Neufeld's pessimism

was well placed. By the 1920s the will of ordinary Mennonite Brethren *Kanadier* to make German and religious instruction a family and congregational priority was lagging. Stated positively, by 1920 the process of language transition among Mennonite Brethren appeared ready to commence. Only in Saskatchewan did this trend proceed relatively unhindered. Elsewhere in Canada, the arrival of the *Russländer* extended the challenges of accommodation and identity for more than another generation.

The Arrival of the Russländer

The mid-1920s witnessed a large second Mennonite migration to Canada. Fleeing the Bolshevik revolution and its aftermath, some 20,000 Mennonites found their way to Ontario and the prairie provinces. Frank Epp, historian of Canadian Mennonites, judges this migration to have created fundamental and permanent change in the character of Canadian Mennonitism.¹⁶ Sociologist E. K. Francis concluded that the migration produced "two Mennonite groups...divided by cultural and class differences. In the eyes of the native Mennonites the newcomers appeared worldly, overbearing and unwilling to do manual labour. The *Russländer* people, on the other hand, found their benefactors...uncouth, backward, miserly and above all, ignorant and uneducated."¹⁷

Mennonite Brethren *Russländer* arriving among their *Kanadier* co-religionists in Saskatchewan and Manitoba brought tension as well. J. H. Lohrenz, in an early history of the Mennonite Brethren, acknowledged that "the amalgamation of the two elements, the earlier Canadians and the brethren from Russia, into one church was sometimes fraught with friction and misunderstanding," but he offered no possible causes.¹⁸

Mennonite Brethren membership increased substantially in the 1920s. In 1921 the Northern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church had 1,790 members in nineteen congregations,¹⁹ four-fifths of whom were located in Saskatche-

wan.²⁰ By 1930 there were 3,870 members scattered in forty-three congregations, an increase in membership over ten years of 116 per cent, most of this influx having occurred in the previous five years. New clusters of Mennonite Brethren were emerging in Ontario, in all the prairie provinces and, eventually, in British Columbia. Manitoba, however, attracted the greatest number of immigrants. Over the ten years Manitoba Mennonite Brethren membership increased by 306 per cent from 365 to 1,483, whereas in Saskatchewan membership grew by 741 or 52 per cent. This regional disparity in *Russländer*-induced growth is significant because in Saskatchewan, where *Russländer* had proportionately less influence, measures aimed at German retention had considerably less effect than in *Russländer*-dominated provinces. Before long, however, the Northern District as a whole was dominated by *Russländer* influence as their leaders rapidly took on front-ranking roles and their numbers overwhelmed the original *Kanadier* presence.

Despite the tension reported between the *Kanadier* and *Russländer*, the immigration did not immediately create a separate sense of identity for the Northern District. Mennonite Brethren still thought of themselves, with considerable justification, as a single North American church united by the *Zionsbote*, Tabor College, the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House in Hillsboro and a common passion for overseas mission. Nevertheless, after the arrival of the *Russländer*, important language-related differences did begin to develop between the Northern District-Canadian segment and the rest of the General Conference. The thirties also marked the beginning of a growing divergence between Mennonite Brethren in Saskatchewan and the rest of Canada. This was first demonstrated by a confrontation between the leadership of the Northern District and the General Conference on the issue of language and Sunday school materials.²¹ Secondly, a serious divergence among Canadian Mennonite Brethren Bible schools emerged.

By 1929 the German heritage of the American Mennonite Brethren was slipping seriously.²² English was being used in the Sunday school material published by the General Confer-

ence at the same time that the newly arrived *Russländer* were making their presence felt among Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Unwilling to accept this intrusion of English into their religious education, Canadians, at the 1930 convention, threatened to boycott the denominational publisher in Hillsboro. This forced the production of a special unilingual German *Lektionsheft*²³ for Canada, demonstrating that a vocal and politically astute segment of Northern District leaders and decision-makers was much more conservative on the question of accepting English than their American counterparts. A parting of the ways between Canadians and Americans on the issue of language was beginning. Clearly, by 1930 the language issue already had the potential to be very volatile. In actuality, the Canadian refusal to accept a minimally bilingual *Lektionsheft* immediately forced its separate publication in both languages. The next year P. H. Berg, assistant manager of the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House in Hillsboro, announced that it was too expensive to produce bilingual Sunday school manuals for the United States and unilingual German manuals for Canada. Henceforth, each would receive their manuals in English and German respectively.

While the 1930 rejection of English in the *Lektionsheft* had been a defensive reaction, by the end of the decade an age-graded German Sunday school curriculum was being produced as a positive initiative aimed at the retention and improvement of German language facility among Mennonite Brethren children. In the long run, this attempt appears to have been a failure as congregations declined to purchase the German materials in sufficient quantities to make them economically viable. Despite its lack of success, the project illustrates the determination of *Russländer* leadership to secure *Deutsch und Religion* by attempting to use the Sunday school to prevent the loss of German among Mennonite Brethren children. Along the way, however, Canadians found themselves breaking another link with their American brethren as they were forced to abandon the denominational publishers in Hillsboro to begin producing their German materials in Canada.

It was A. H. Unruh, *Russländer* principal of Pniel Bible

School at Winkler and newly appointed editor of the *Lektionsheft*, who initiated the attempt to secure unilingual German Sunday school materials in Canadian Sunday schools by making them more suitable to various age groups. In July of 1937 Unruh persuaded the Northern District to approve a German Sunday school curriculum designed for children aged nine to twelve. Wasting no time, by October he had translated the new materials from the Scripture Press Sunday school curriculum published in Chicago and secured their release under the auspices of the Sunday School Committee of the General Conference. In his introduction to the first manual, Unruh expressed the hope that the many Sunday schools already using graded material would accept his new publication as a suitable replacement.²⁴ This constituted a significant admission. Since there were no other German graded materials available to Mennonite Brethren congregations at this time, he can only have meant that many congregations were already using English materials and that he was offering these German materials as a replacement. In effect, Unruh was asking Canadian congregations that had already begun to adopt English into their Sunday schools to revert to German instruction and materials. This constituted a fundamental misreading of the needs of the congregations and their children, and Unruh's hopes proved illusory.

Within two years the project was in serious trouble. The first year's orders had amounted to a scant 600 copies²⁵ and continuing poor demand and high production costs ultimately resulted in the Canadians being forced to produce their own materials. Americans refused to subsidize the acquisition of German Sunday school materials.²⁶ The Canadians also faced a serious language problem in their Sunday schools but they were unwilling, or unable, to accommodate themselves to the erosion of German facility among their youth. In its first report, the newly formed Northern District Sunday School Committee admitted that its most serious problem was the diminishing German facility of the children.²⁷ Chairperson A. A. Kroeker²⁸ believed most children were still able to understand German, but were finding it difficult to work through a German Sunday school lesson or

assignment by themselves. Nevertheless, the committee was determined to persevere and demanded that congregations teach their children German. Committee member G. W. Peters confirmed that it was in the interests of the German language that the conference had begun translating Sunday school material but success now depended on every congregation, Sunday school and district conducting summer German school to teach reading and writing. Certain localities, he said, had already found this helpful. The Conference decided to remain with the new format of materials and accept the offer of the *Mennonitische Rundschau* to print them in Winnipeg.

These developments demonstrate that further divergence between the American and Canadian sectors was becoming evident. Apparently the Canadians believed they could escape the course of developments they saw already unfolding among their co-religionists to the south. Portents of their failure were already discernable. While many Canadian Mennonite Brethren were still able to understand a German sermon or Sunday school lesson, it was equally plain that German ability among the young was making the crucial cross-over from being active and creative to being merely passive. The children's everyday language was already English, and soon their language of religious experience would have to follow suit unless the program of translating and using interactive German Sunday school materials could reverse the trend.

The 1930s revealed a growing gulf between the perceptions and aspirations of Canadian Conference leaders and the linguistic reality among their youth. In 1938 and 1939 as the Unruh curriculum was being introduced, *Russländer* leaders such as J. A. Toews of Coaldale and Johann Toews of the Bethany Bible Institute assured Northern District delegates that the prospects of *Deutsch und Religion* were bright. The irony is that during the late 1930s and early 1940s the German language was not only losing ground among children and adolescents but also among young adults attending Mennonite Brethren Bible schools. At the 1929 Northern District convention, where leaders had demanded a unilingual *Lektionsheft*, the Bible school

program had included singing in English. By 1932 the Festival Sunday of the Northern Conference convention included an English sermon preached by *Kanadier* W. J. Bestvater of the Herbert Bible School. The language of the sermon was specifically noted in the minutes. These events may have seemed like insignificant English intrusions into an otherwise secure German-Mennonite regime, but they pointed to the fact that Saskatchewan Bible schools were on the leading edge of Mennonite Brethren accommodation to the English language. The early teaching of English grammar at the Herbert Bible School has been noted. In 1927 the Bethany Bible School was started at Hepburn, Saskatchewan, and again there was an English component in the curriculum from the beginning.²⁹

The Winkler Bible School,³⁰ by contrast, had been founded on a completely German curriculum in 1925 by A. H. Unruh who was a Russian-certified teacher, German specialist and former teacher at the Tschongraw Bible School in the Crimea. In 1939 the Conference faced a lack of coordinated effort among its Bible schools. Bible school faculties were also poorly trained. Thus, a commission was formed to address the need for a unified curriculum, and the lack of instructors with more advanced religious and general educational qualifications.

A special commission to help coordinate the Bible school programs across the Northern District was appointed in 1939, pointing to a growing divergence among the Bible schools. This divergence included different attitudes regarding the centrality of language to faith. The drive to retain the German language had been central to the earliest mandate of Mennonite Brethren Bible schools. By the 1930s, however, leading schools such as Bethany Bible School at Hepburn, Saskatchewan were being confronted with a demand for more English. Two factors were forcing the transition to English: the desire of young students to serve in non-German, non-Mennonite settings, and the existence of English Bible schools better able to prepare students for this kind of work. According to Margaret Epp's personal recollections of her time at the school, 1935 marks the beginning of the end of German at Bethany. Another Bethany student, George

Thiessen, asserted that in the spring of 1935 his whole senior class confronted the faculty on the issue of language. According to Epp, "they felt they needed more English, to be prepared for service in non-Mennonite communities. If Bethany could supply this need they hoped to return. Otherwise they would plan to go elsewhere for their training. By the end of the first decade the changeover was almost complete. My class, '37, had only a few hours a week of German...in our fourth year."³¹

This threat from the Bethany senior class shows that by 1935 a significant number of Mennonite Brethren youth was prepared to reject German Mennonite Brethren schools in favour of English Bible instruction. It was even reported at the 1935 District convention that while the number of Mennonite Brethren students in all Northern District Bible schools was 435, if the students attending the "English Bible Institutes" were included, this number would be significantly higher.³² This crucial admission indicates that the sentiments of George Thiessen and his classmates were not isolated examples. The 1939 special Bible school commission on program coordination was at least in part an attempt to address the problem of language.

By the early 1940s the Winkler school was facing similar pressures but offering a more conservative response. Although willing to include English subjects in the curriculum, the school still was not willing to give students unable to function in German their full endorsement for Mennonite Brethren ministry. In part, the policy seems to have been guided by the intent to graduate bilingual students. The Winkler catalogue of 1941-42 included a detailed policy on language stipulating that each student wanting to pursue a full course at the Bible school had to be proficient in both languages. Fully approved graduation and endorsement for public ministry were specifically reserved for those with proven capability in both languages. In the five-year curriculum of the school, there were twenty English courses out of a total of fifty-five.³³

The Hepburn and Winkler schools illustrate the lack of linguistic congruity among the estimated nine schools then extant. At a time when Bethany was almost completely English,

Winkler reserved its unqualified graduating endorsement for students who were proficient in oral and written German. Thus, within Canada, multiple differences were developing. The contrast between Saskatchewan, with its formerly *Amerikaner* late *Kanadier* base, and other provinces with their predominantly *Russländer* constituency, is complicated by a divergence of the attitudes of Mennonite Brethren leaders and at least some ordinary members. This growing lack of connection between the goals and declared perceptions of leaders, and the actual experience of ordinary Mennonite Brethren members, is seen in the response of rank and file Canadian Mennonite Brethren to the 1937 inauguration of *The Christian Leader*, an American Mennonite Brethren paper in the English language. In 1933 P. H. Berg of the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House in Hillsboro had begun preparing the ground for including more youth-oriented English material in the *Zionsbote*, but he also noted that occasional linguistic experiments elicited "violent protest."³⁴ At the next General Conference convention three years later Berg reported that the process of language transition was continuing rapidly. J. K. Warkentin, chairman of the General Conference Publications Committee, then presented the following recommendation:

Whereas the language problem is getting increasingly serious in our congregations, and we want to provide the youth with suitable literature while also accommodating the older members, we ask the Conference to consider if this is not the time to publish an English periodical...to accommodate our English-speaking youth.³⁵

The recommendation was accepted. April 1937 saw the first issue of *The Christian Leader* declaring itself to be "A Christian monthly journal, English organ of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, devoted to the interests of the young people and to the cause of Christ in general." The inaugural editorial did not attempt to justify the paper in terms of language. Indeed, there was no mention of language whatsoever.³⁶

Early success was evident as the *Leader* secured 800 paid

subscriptions by May of the first year. In August this had risen to 1,200 and by October 1939 Berg was reporting 1,600 subscriptions.³⁷ Canadian response was enthusiastic. A. B. Voth, writing on behalf of the Hepburn Saskatchewan youth, affirmed that, "We as the younger generation want to and should do a great deal of reading, but up to the present there has been comparatively little really satisfying Christian literature within our reach."³⁸ Mrs. I. H. Voth of Morden, Manitoba reported that at the Zion Mission *Nähverein* "the girls were expressing their joy that 'The Christian Leader' had come again, and how they were blessed reading it."³⁹ One Canadian reader blessed the *Leader* in a prayerful poem:

Oh that this little magazine be spread,
That many more may find the way of rest;
Then we do know 'tis by the Spirit led.
Oh, Father, let not this journal be unblessed!⁴⁰

Whatever Canadian Mennonite Brethren delegates and leaders might be saying and doing, other rank and file members from every province were ready to hear an official Mennonite Brethren voice speaking English.

Clearly, by the 1940s, more than a decade after the *Russländer* had arrived, the Northern District was showing signs of becoming a mixed community in terms of language use for religious purposes. Some Mennonite Brethren, notably in Saskatchewan, were even using the English language as a bridge to interdenominational cooperation.⁴² While congregations in Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba were trying to teach German at the congregational level, Saskatchewan was showing little interest in that direction. In this regard Saskatchewan continued to behave as a northern extension of the original American Mennonite Brethren dating from the first migration. Despite early efforts by leaders to resist accommodation the late *Kanadier* had continued to assimilate more and more English into their religious practice. Had they not been overwhelmed by the coming of the *Russländer* there is every possibility that their language transition would have kept pace with their American counterparts. As it was, the *Russländer* served as a crucial new

force rejuvenating the prospects of *Deutsch und Religion* and initiating a process of increasing differentiation between Canadian and American Mennonite Brethren.⁴²

First Attempts to "Regulate the Situation"

In the summer of 1945, Coaldale patriarch Benjamin B. Janz toured the young-adult missions efforts of Alberta and shared his reflections with *Mennonitische Rundschau* editor Henry F. Klassen in a pessimistic letter. The only future certainty he saw was the "ruin of all that is good." At best, leaders could hope to retain the German language long enough to avoid an actual schism with its "rupture and pain, misunderstanding and contempt."⁴³ Nine years later Janz referred to these efforts as "regulating the situation."⁴⁴ The years from 1940 to 1947 saw the first measures being taken to this end.

On the threshold of a new decade, in 1940, the first generation of Mennonite Brethren *Russländer* to be educated in Canada was ready to test its identity and strength against the challenges of the future. It was the time between depression and war. During the 1930s they had discovered the city; economic depression and large farming families created a pool of able young people, especially women, ready to seek employment in the cities where their cross-cultural exposure flourished. Conference leaders responded to Mennonite urbanization with suspicion, but urban-based services to its own people, and even city missions, were quickly established. Then 1939 brought World War II, naturally sharpening the clash of Mennonite and Anglo-Saxon culture, but also bringing experiences that further bridged the cultural isolation of Mennonite youths. Elders insisted that their young men follow Anabaptist-Mennonite pacifist doctrine and refuse to fight. The many who obeyed soon found themselves in work camps for conscientious objectors where, for the first time, they participated in worship conducted in the English language. For these men, the linkage between language and worship was significantly loosened.⁴⁵ Some Mennonite Brethren

young men in Manitoba were invited by the United Church of Canada to fill wartime gaps in their ministries to Canadian aboriginal peoples.⁴⁶ During the 1940s and 50s these young Mennonite Brethren continued to face an important challenge: How could they make their German Mennonite religious tradition relevant to their expanding experience grounded in English-speaking Canadian society?

It is already apparent that by 1940 the language issue had become a divisive force among Mennonite Brethren. Confrontation had emerged in the General Conference and there was a growing gap between leaders and ordinary Mennonite Brethren, especially their youth. During the 1940s leaders were forced to acknowledge that their Bible schools, Sunday schools and youth faced a deepening crisis as virtually all the working committees of the conference were compelled to address the language issue.⁴⁷ Their response between 1944 and 1946 consisted of multiple initiatives. A Northern District Youth Committee was formed which sponsored a new bilingual youth periodical. The Canada Inland Mission was started to co-opt and coordinate the outreach efforts of English-speaking Mennonite Brethren youth who were serving at arm's length from their home congregations. A new, powerful Committee of Reference and Counsel was formed which promptly took independent steps to acquire a 10 per cent interest in the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. Finally, a new, Canadian Conference-sponsored "higher" Bible school was launched in an attempt to retain and train the best of Mennonite Brethren youth for bilingual ministry at home and multi-lingual missions abroad.

When the war ended, some Mennonite Brethren Conference leaders understood that English had already made permanent inroads into their congregations and institutions and that a transition to more and more English was only a matter of time. This insight appears to have produced an informal policy of bilingualism designed to acknowledge the new English reality but also to contain it and to do everything possible to ensure that German would remain a permanent and dominant feature of Mennonite Brethren faith, piety and ministry. This policy of bi-

lingualism had a very important implication for the local congregation. Early reliance on district school instruction had been unsuccessful. An effort to institutionalize language and religious instruction in congregational boards of education had failed in the early 1920s. Age-graded German Sunday school lessons were being poorly received. Now, in the early 1940s, leaders were forced to admit the failure of Bible schools to prepare young adults competent in German. A new Bible College was established on a bilingual policy but it was not willing to promise basic German instruction. This had to be acquired elsewhere.

The developments of these decades can be understood in part as the devolution of the burden to retain the German language from the district school to the Bible school to the local congregation and the family. This meant that those most insistent that German remain strong and entrenched, namely, some leaders and the older generation, were projecting the burden of their demands onto younger parents and youth—those facing the strongest needs and pressures to assimilate to the English mainstream of Canadian society. This analysis can be documented in the reports and actions of the Northern District Conference between 1940 and 1947.

Mennonite Brethren responses to urbanization serve to underline the different attitudes between Saskatchewan and the remainder of the Northern District Conference. The initial urbanization of Mennonite Brethren during the depression conditions of the 1930s had stimulated the establishment of denominationally sponsored homes and placement agencies for young Mennonite Brethren women working in the cities. City mission stations had also been started in Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Vancouver. In 1941 the Northern District Convention heard H. S. and Anna Rempel, city mission workers in Saskatoon, report that they were rapidly incorporating English into their ministry. Virtually all the literature they had distributed previously had been German but now, during wartime, they had energetically switched to English materials. Other forms of English outreach were also emerging. A year earlier the first Mennonite Brethren radio broadcast, "Gospel Tidings," had been started in English in

Caswell Hill, northern Saskatchewan,⁴⁸ followed by another summer broadcast in 1941 called "Morning Devotions." Furthermore, in contrast to both Winnipeg and Vancouver, Saskatoon was conducting its city Sunday school and children's worship services in English.⁴⁹ Saskatchewan was again in the vanguard of adapting its ministries to its surrounding English milieu.

These attitudes stand in marked contrast to those exhibited two years later by Vancouver city missionaries Jacob and Sara Thiessen who saw urbanization and the loss of the German language as twin threats:

The warning should be repeated at our council meetings and conventions. Most of our people do not see the dangers. City mission will always be necessary but more than ever, the cry needs to reach our people, "Flee the city! Go back to the country! For the sake of their souls' salvation, keep your children busy at home!"⁵⁰

Three extended anecdotes, all dealing with sexual temptation in the city, underscored this impassioned plea. Sex in the city, however, was not the only danger; *Deutsch und Religion* were also at risk. Thiessen continued:

He who speaks two languages is much richer, of course, than he who knows only one. For this reason we must preserve our mother tongue at all costs. This is easy in any case, if we, as matter of basic practice, restrict our language to German in our families, in the church, and in normal conversation among ourselves. The loss of a language constitutes the destruction of a culture; to acquire a language is to gain a culture.⁵¹

While the *Russländer* Thiessens inveighed against the evils of the city, the *Kanadier* Rempels, city missionaries in Saskatoon, were again taking a different tack. They frankly admitted that their Sunday school had become completely English because many parents spoke only English to their children. They were now preparing to conduct their evening services entirely in English.⁵² The divergent attitudes regarding language and religion between Bethany and Winkler were also reflected in Saskatoon and Vancouver.

The Saskatoon city missionaries appeared encouraged but Sunday school leaders were frustrated. Reports of the early forties show that English was already firmly established in the Sunday schools of Saskatchewan congregations while other regions were declaring theirs to be solidly German. Still, language had become an overwhelming concern as the Conference-sponsored German Sunday school materials failed to forge a connection between the religious education of Mennonite Brethren children and the German language. The Sunday school Committee remained determined "to find a way to rescue their children and youth out of the current spirit of carelessness"⁵³ but congregations did not agree that expanding the publication of the graded German materials was the way to accomplish this. In 1941, out of seventy-two Sunday schools, only seven indicated interest in buying any newly published materials. The complaints of the committee in 1942 highlighted both the problem and the committee's own attitude: "In many congregations, the children do not know enough German to complete the work requested by these [Mennonite Brethren] materials, and then one grasps after a lesson manual which does not require anything of the student. ...The Conference is far from unified concerning these materials."⁵⁴ The committee's answer was an impassioned appeal for congregations, the Conference and the Bible schools to end this "Tug of War,"⁵⁵ but no move was made to acknowledge the plight of the local congregations. Ending the tug of war apparently meant obeying the exhortations of the leaders.

The next year, however, the committee was forced to report that language really was the most critical problem connected with its Canadian German curriculum.⁵⁶ Fewer than half the congregations were using the graded German lessons and the evidence compelled the committee to admit that "the principal problem was language." Forty-three (67 per cent) of the Sunday schools were conducted in German but another twenty-five (33 per cent) were bilingual. A district-by-district report indicated a clear division in the Conference along late *Kanadier-Russländer* lines. Saskatchewan showed the most English usage while British Columbia and Alberta claimed that all their instruction was

in German and declined to mention any problems at all. Manitoba confessed difficulty with the language and indicated that of twenty-two Sunday schools, three were bilingual and the rest were German. Again, there was no attempt to confront the problem; leaders were unwilling to try to rescue the children by accommodating their need for English Sunday school materials.

The growing Sunday school language problem was paralleled in the challenges being faced by the Bible schools. discussions. Since the late 1930s the conference had been concerned about the diminishing ability of the Bible schools to act as a unifying force among Mennonite Brethren youth and their congregations. Now these schools faced additional challenges. In 1944, despite the glowing special report of British Columbia Bible school enthusiast Cornelius C. Peters, delegates pointed to persistent problems.⁵⁷ Schools were having trouble retaining their instructors. Many Mennonite Brethren young people were choosing to attend English Bible schools that in turn were making significant inroads into the Mennonite Brethren constituency in their quest for financial support. The answer came from Bible School Committee chairman B. B. Janz as he successfully presented a concrete proposal for a higher Bible school.⁵⁹ Thus, by 1944, growing awareness of a Bible school crisis had produced a bold new initiative in the founding of a bilingual nationally based Bible College.

The background to this action can be traced to a series of developments. The Bible schools did not function cooperatively. The graduates of competing schools were finding it difficult to work together harmoniously in the local congregations. Many young people attended non-Mennonite Brethren schools and became critical of their home congregations. Students arrived at Bible school with very weak religious backgrounds and this limited the program. Watered-down Mennonite Brethren Bible school programs caused the more able students to choose non-Mennonite Brethren schools with higher standards.⁵⁹ Only when the problem could no longer be denied was its language dimension acknowledged. Winkler Bible school instructor A. A. Kroeker declared that "at the point of entry, students have a

weaker command of the German language than in previous years.”⁶⁰ The Bible School Committee was constrained to make the same admission, “The language problem has also not yet been solved. ... We have to accept that we are in a transitional period.”⁶¹

Thus, by the 1943 convention, the Bible School Committee had admitted that Mennonite Brethren were losing their more gifted students and was ready to address the need for a school of higher education in Canada. The rationale included the need for chaplains in the alternative service camps, teachers in the Bible schools and workers in the congregations. An impassioned speech by B. B. Janz moved the convention to create a special fund in support of Bible school education and have a special offering for the project. Furthermore, the Bible School Committee was asked to prepare a concrete proposal for presentation at the next convention. While these instructions included no direct mention of language, it appears the crisis in the Bible schools had indeed stimulated some active response. The next year, delegates accepted Janz’ detailed recommendation to create a new “higher Bible school”⁶² and engaged A. H. Unruh as the first president of Mennonite Brethren Bible College.

Language was not explicitly highlighted as part of the rationale for the fledgling Bible College but the its supervising committee could not avoid the issue. Furthermore, tension soon emerged between the language policy of the college administration and the expectations of its Mennonite Brethren constituency. What emerged as the school took shape was a policy of bilingualism juxtaposed with an assumption that the college was the Conference’s newest ally in the battle to save the German language. At its inaugural meeting, the Higher Bible School Committee confronted the question of whether German or English would be the official language of the school. President-elect Unruh replied: “We plan to have two sections in the higher Bible school, the German section and the English section. Thus, both languages will come into play fully and completely. When I, as director of the school have anything to say, it will be in the German language. The brothers working in the English section are

allowed to conduct themselves with the students in English.”⁶³

After one year as president Unruh resigned and John B. Toews was called to lead the fledgling school. Toews had been the principal of the Bethany Bible School when it converted to English in the late 1930s. Now, the *Russländer* Toews found himself called to strict account for the language policy at the Bible College. At the 1946 convention Toews addressed the language question directly in a comprehensive seven-page report.⁶⁴ His analysis of the curriculum by subject and language of instruction made it obvious that the school was being established on a bilingual foundation.⁶⁵ Toews noted that the graduates of certain Bible schools were weak in both languages, being unable to write in either German or English. Toews stated flatly that if Mennonite Brethren wanted to retain the German language, they must cultivate German in their homes, religion schools, high schools and Bible schools. The college wanted to prepare graduates able to serve well in both languages, but this would only be possible if congregations and Bible schools did their part in preparing prospective students adequately. By implication, Toews was saying that the college was not prepared to accept the burden of language preservation.

The ensuing discussion focused on language at length, and Toews was specifically pressed by the British Columbia delegation to make German language study compulsory for all students. He responded with carefully worded assurances that college graduates would be able to work in both languages.⁶⁶ The reason Toews refused to accept the burden of language retention was evident in the report of C. C. Peters of British Columbia who spoke on behalf of the Bible schools. Of the nine schools in the Conference, seven offered a curriculum that was at least 50 per cent or more English.⁶⁷ Toews was not willing to shackle the college with the consequences of this disparity. Furthermore, Toews himself was unwilling to see his ministry diverted by what he saw as a fruitless cultural struggle over language and within two years he was preparing to resign from the College for a pastoral call to Reedley, California.⁶⁸

In any event, the burden of German retention now was

placed still one rung lower on the educational ladder as delegates endorsed the recommendation of the Bible school principals that every congregation institute a local religion-school. In the face of this downward devolution of responsibility, the congregational dilemma was also becoming clear. British Columbia admitted that its children and youth lacked a solid interest in Sunday school. Many children were attending Sunday school only because they were forced to and many youths were attending church only as long as they were under parental authority. It was hinted that the cause of these difficulties lay in the home. There was no hint that they might be language-related.

The founding of the Bible College was only one concrete action taken by the Conference to confront the growing language problem. By the middle of the 1940s the confrontation of German and English had involved the Sunday school, the Bible schools, the emerging Bible College and was becoming a regular feature of home missions reports that provided information on the status of congregational ministries and city missions. In all of these contexts, youth found themselves the subject of increased concern and scrutiny. H. F. Klassen, editor of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, presented a thorough analysis of this concern in "*Wie können wir etwas für die Jugend tun?*"⁶⁹ He claimed that in recent years many Mennonite Brethren youth had deviated from their faith. By Klassen's reckoning, the cause was not hard to find. The first generation in Canada (he meant the *Russländer*) had been too busy becoming established to note a crisis in the Mennonite community. Mennonites were now living apart from each other in a non-Mennonite environment, their children exposed to the secularism of a public school system and the influences of radio, the daily press and literature. All this was now bearing obvious fruit. Parents, ministers and Sunday school teachers were observing how their former authority was fading and many youths were ashamed to be known as Mennonites. Attracted to other fashions, to another language, and to foreign perspectives, they had begun to neglect, or deny their Mennonite values, traditions, simplicity and even their Mennonite religion. Were Mennonite Brethren congregations prepared,

Klassen challenged, to give their youth the training and leadership needed to keep them?

This challenge was answered with the formation of a Youth Committee for the Northern District Conference.⁷⁰ Concern for Mennonite Brethren youth, however, did not restrict itself to the wayward. The best and most dedicated were equally in need of leadership, and the creation of the Canada Inland Mission in 1944-45 was an attempt to utilize, as well as regulate, the efforts of Mennonite Brethren young adults already at work in missions outside the confines of local Mennonite Brethren congregations. Through the latter thirties and into the forties they had been engaging in tract distribution, summer vacation Bible schools, radio broadcasts, colportage ministry and mission Sunday schools, all in the English language, and most often among non-Mennonites. Now the Conference wanted to bring this vibrant movement under its own direction and discipline through the Canada Inland Mission.

As the fledgling Northern District Youth Committee presented its first report to the 1945 convention, it was evident that the Bible College was not the only example of bilingual policy in the mid-forties. The Youth Committee also sought to bridge the growing language tension with its own version of bilingualism. Specifically, the committee successfully gained permission to "publish a youth paper in both German and English, in fact, to adopt the commendable paper presently being published by Manitoba and distribute it to the entire Conference."⁷¹ The *Jugendblatt*, as the new publication was known, had begun as *Das Konferenz-Jugendblatt der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde von Manitoba* in May 1944 and was published every several months. The first Canada-wide issue of the *Jugendblatt* appeared in March 1946 with H. F. Klassen, who was also the editor of the *Rundschau* and the chairman of the Canadian Youth Committee, in charge. It consisted of sixty-five items on thirty-two pages, fifteen of which were in English, and six of which were in the Saskatchewan section.⁷² Thus, while the policy of bilingualism was now receiving some definition, it certainly did not mean an equal use of both languages.

In his 1946 report to the Canadian Conference Klassen felt constrained to defend even this modest use of English. He was, he said, trying to hold to the "golden mean" as a way of ensuring a broader readership among the youth themselves, and not just among youth leaders and workers. At this time, Klassen was not defending the use of English in the hope of an eventual total transition. In an earlier issue Klassen had asserted that it would be a sin to convert all youth work to English and abandon the treasure of the German heritage. The youths were intelligent enough to learn and use two languages. Rather than adopting English, one should have strong Saturday schools for religion and language.⁷³ In contrast to the Bible College program that had virtual parity between the two languages, it appears that Klassen was working for a modest and unequal bilingualism.

In 1946 Ontario formally joined the Canadian Conference as a provincial district and the basic shape of the Conference was set for the next thirty years. Provision was made to issue a new constitution in both German and English, although the assumed language of conference affairs remained German and the yearbook containing the proceedings of the annual convention also remained German.

Another important development in the growing institutional maturity of the Canadian Conference was the creation of a Committee of Reference and Counsel in the previous year. This body consisted of two men from each Canadian province, plus an executive of moderator, assistant moderator and secretary. In contrast to the other standing committees that had specific assignments delineated by particular branches of Conference endeavour, this committee was a leadership group for the Conference as a whole. In part this body was intended to focus information, important new initiatives and pivotal leadership in a single body. The measure of this committee's initiative was taken immediately. At the next convention B. B. Janz explained that the committee had taken action to acquire the Christian Press of Winnipeg with its two German papers, the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and the *Jugendfreund*. While the committee would have liked to wait for Conference approval, this had not been possible.

Rather than lose an opportunity to acquire the *Rundschau*, the leadership had proceeded on its own. The motivation, as explained by Conference treasurer C. A. DeFehr of Winnipeg, was quite specific. The committee wanted to buy the press to gain control of "the *Rundschau*, the most widely distributed Mennonite paper in our mother tongue."⁷⁴ When asked if the Conference would ratify the committee's action, the vote of affirmation was unanimous. Now the Canadian Conference held a 10 per cent interest in a major German language weekly with the remaining shares held privately by Mennonite Brethren individuals.⁷⁵ Thus, at the very time when Canadian Mennonite Brethren were taking cautious steps toward a bilingual *Jugendblatt* for its youth, it also took decisive action to own an inter-Mennonite German paper with 11,000 readers.⁷⁶ Again, the balance of bilingual emphasis was being defined in concrete action.

Having secured control of the *Rundschau*, the highest level of Conference leadership began to engage the language issue directly. At the next convention the Committee of Reference and Counsel set out its definition of the language question, that is, "What must be done to preserve the German language in our worship and our Sunday school?"⁷⁷ The answer was equally to the point:

Several brothers justifiably fear that we could lose the German language in our worship services. This impression is based on the figures in the statistics of our congregations and the reports from our districts. To prevent this, the Committee of Reference and Counsel recommends that an appropriate appeal be directed to the homes, the congregations, and the districts with the friendly request that everything possible be done to retain the German language at home, in the religion-schools, in the Bible schools, in the Sunday schools.⁷⁸

The recommendation was accepted unanimously. Obviously, the committee was not yet prepared to take any direct action but its position was clear. In the minds of some, a real danger existed. The committee also knew the issue was becoming sensitive; the language of "appeal" and "friendly request" cannot have been

accidental. Most significant in the assessment was the admission that worship itself was being threatened. This was borne out by the Music Committee report. A survey of sixty congregations with forty-five returns indicated that 24 per cent of the music being sung by Mennonite Brethren choirs was in English.⁷⁹ English preaching could not be far behind.

In the two decades since the *Russländer* immigration, Canadian Mennonite Brethren had become well established. The *Russländer* had successfully distinguished themselves from the larger North American brotherhood and were increasingly independent. They had not been successful in dominating the Saskatchewan late *Kanadier*, however—at least not in terms of language. Saskatchewan's steady progress through transition no doubt constantly reminded the rest of the Canadian Conference of what lay in the future. Saskatchewan also was demonstrating the possibility of forging a healthy, vigorous—and English—Mennonite Brethren identity. For the conference as a whole, a grudging acknowledgment of reality had led to a policy of bilingualism and a limited amount of accommodation, but very real potential for conflict remained. The founding years of the Bible College illustrated the conflicting expectations being projected on Conference institutions. Another area of emerging tension was the need to meet the new and growing demands of a new-Canadian generation while at the same time validating the concerns and fears of an older immigrant generation. A generation ready to test its new-world freedom and vision confronted an old-world generation assured of its God-given right to define the Truth unilaterally. It remained to be seen which generation was really being put to the test.

3

Confrontation Engaged

The crucial year in the on-going effort to address the language crisis was 1952 when the forces of German retention succeeded in capturing the Conference agenda and mobilizing congregational energy in a campaign to save their mother tongue. Their hope was short-lived, however. Within two years a relentless stream of evidence began pouring in that the tide of transition was too strong to withstand. Nevertheless, the sense of urgent crisis compelling the German "retainers" escalated sharply between 1947 and 1952 when rhetoric demanding the defense of the Mennonite mother tongue became increasingly strident. Thus, the five years from 1948 to 1952 are crucial and merit careful examination. This is also the period just before the language question began to become critical in the congregations. The painful and difficult sides of congregational language transition will be examined in the later case studies but those developments cannot be understood without first taking the pulse of the passions unleashed in this time.

Passions are Defined

A concerted and growing effort to retain the German language is discernible immediately after 1946; the war years had set the stage for a crusade that lasted well into the 1950s. One direct result of the war with implications for the language question was the onset of a third wave of Mennonite immigration into Canada. These new Canadian Mennonite Brethren elicited strong feelings of empathy from *Russländer* who could well remember when they themselves had arrived as German-speaking strangers. There was an immediate resurgence in the demand for German religious services and a drive to rescue a fading linguistic heritage.¹ Post-war determination to recoup German cannot be attributed to these developments, but hundreds of new Ger-

man-speaking refugees and émigrés reinforced the determination of many older *Russländer* to resist the tide of English and exacerbated the sense of righteous, even divine, mission to which they felt called. Their cause, after all, was driven by their duty to defend the faith and to welcome the stranger and to comfort the old in their midst.

The third wave of Canadian Mennonite migration began in 1947, rapidly escalated to a peak the next year with 3,828 immigrants and then tapered off in the mid-1950s.² These newcomers, who arrived directly from Europe as refugees, swelled the ranks of Mennonite congregations. The new immigrants did not create the deep sense of crisis and trauma that characterized the German-English transition among Canadian Mennonite Brethren; the essential features of this crisis were discernible in 1947, before immigration had exerted any significant influence on the language situation. For example, in February 1947 a letter to the editor of the *Jugendblatt*, in English, questioned whether the publication was a genuinely youth-oriented paper so long as it insisted on including German content:

In my opinion it should be called *Konferenz-Blatt*, rather than *Jugend-Blatt*, because our young people would prefer to have it all in English. As it is now, they look at the pictures, read the English letters and articles, and then leave it. I do think that we cannot hold our young people with the German language, but with the Gospel we can. Some do emphasize the language above the gospel.

[This next paragraph appeared in German.] No hard feelings please. We love the *Konferenz-Jugendblatt* and understand that it is being edited according to Conference wishes. We hope that in time the paper will truly begin to serve the youth.³

This almost apologetic appeal elicited a sharp rebuttal in the next issue. The author, identified only as "A. H.," complained that if the *Jugendblatt* appeared in English only, the elderly could no longer participate vicariously in the ministries and experiences of their youth. The letter continued, "Which Christian-minded

youth would approve [of the elderly being cut off in such a way]? I think the responsibility of language-learning belongs, first, to the youth and not the elderly."⁴ Their forefathers in Russia, A. H. continued, mastered two languages as did the Mennonites in Paraguay and Brazil. There was no reason why Canadian youth could not also learn two languages since they had access to Mennonite high schools and Bible schools. If necessary, the youth could buy books and teach themselves.

Several salient features of the debate over language were evident in this exchange. The opinion that the *Jugendblatt* should appear in English was offered in private correspondence to the appropriate decision-maker. Its tone was generally positive and there was an explicit attempt to soften the appeal by asking Klassen not to take offense. The reply was much longer, being well-reasoned and offering well-marshaled arguments in its defense. Its arguments were wide-ranging and comprehensive, exploiting a range of experience and sentiment beyond anything to which a young person could appeal. The suggestion that to recommend an English *Jugendblatt* was un-Christian indicated how viscerally some would associate their German and their religious faith and how sharply they were prepared to condemn any who questioned this association. Thus, features of the debate were emerging. For the most part, only one side could be heard because the periodicals were official or semi-official organs of the Conference. Those in control of their content were also leaders in the Conference. Generational tension was already evident in the conviction that the problem belonged to the youth; the obligation to learn and obey was theirs. Wisdom and experience, however, were on the side of German-retainers. Furthermore, to question the linguistic status quo was less Christian. These expressions, designed to subordinate the younger generation and impute to it a lack of respect and loyalty, were offered by one who claimed to be motivated by a sincere desire to remain in solidarity with the work and life of the youth. The stage, the topic and the style of argument of the ensuing debate could now be discerned.

The June 1947 issue of the *Jugendblatt* carried an ex-

tended defense of the German language that revealed a further important dimension of the attitude and mind-set of the German-retainers. The article, titled "*Wie erzielt man Liebe und Verständnis für die Muttersprache?*"⁵ was written by Anna Wiebe, a teacher at Eden Christian College, a Mennonite Brethren high school at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. Wiebe concluded, "From the foregoing we see that home and upbringing play a deciding role in one's attaining or not attaining a love for one's mother tongue."⁶ Both the fundamental problem and its ultimate solution were defined in the language of family, home and nurture—literally, "motherhood." At stake was the intellectual, spiritual and religious heritage first imparted at mother's breast. A large measure of the responsibility for losing that birthright would be placed on the home. It was equally evident that neglecting one's mother tongue was tantamount to denying one's own mother. In their campaign of persuasion and manipulation, German-retainers were determined that parents, youth and children refrain from using any language but High German in the home. They were equally certain that failure to do so would bring much pain and ultimate schism in the Mennonite Brethren community, and the sin of causing such trauma would be laid at the doorstep of these parents, youth and children.

The Canadian Conference Committee for the German Language

Subsequent to spearheading the Mennonite Brethren acquisition of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, the Committee of Reference and Council took only one major action on behalf of the German language. This was its 1950 recommendation to form a Canadian Conference Committee for the Preservation of the German language.⁷ The formation of the Committee for the German Language introduced a new factor into the contest. It focused the increasing preoccupation of some in the Conference with the language question into a single committee. Thus, the volatility of the issue was contained somewhat, keeping it from

dominating other agenda items. Dignifying the issue with a standing committee, however, also ensured that the matter would be raised annually and that the pro-German faction could hope to address Conference delegates regularly. In reality, by 1953 the committee was placed near or at the end of the annual convention agenda with the result that occasionally its report was not even presented publicly. The reports of the committee, however, provide an important annual documentation of the pro-German campaign and its effectiveness.

The immediate developments leading to the committee's formation go back to 1948 when the Mennonite Brethren Bible school and the high school teachers of British Columbia requested a Canadian Conference Education Committee to coordinate all educational endeavours in the Canadian Conference.⁸ One of the main reasons such a committee was needed, they said, was to deal with the constant shortage of suitable German textbooks. The Conference, after long discussion, obliged. The 1949 report of chairman F. C. Thiessen of Abbotsford, representing the high schools in British Columbia, was a detailed profile of the language situation and the committee's work and proposals.⁹ It was plain that matters such as curriculum and textbooks were simply occasions for the deeper language issue to come to the surface. For Thiessen, responsibility for the language crisis lay with the home that had refused its duty and failed to provide children with a basic grounding in their "beloved mother tongue." Now the youth considered the German language just so much "unnecessary ballast"—an utterly unacceptable situation. Mennonite Brethren had not been born into German-speaking families by chance, Thiessen declared. It was the express will of God. He could not believe that God now wanted to take the mother tongue away from them, nor did he find this loss of German to be biblically grounded. Having invoked the authority of God and the Bible against the delinquency of family and youth, Thiessen concluded by charging that certain unidentified authorities were weakening in their support of the German language, saying that a complete transition to English was inevitable. Finally, Thiessen called the Conference to form

an Education Committee to supervise and promote educational endeavours outside those of the College. The delegates received the report but were unable to reach consensus on the recommendations; they referred the matter to the Committee of Reference and Counsel.¹⁰

Thiessen, speaking on behalf of the high schools and Bible schools, raised the stakes considerably. Parents were accused of being derelict in their duty with the result that educators could not repair the damage and young people cared nothing for their God-given mother tongue. Leaders were accused of being faithless and capitulating to the inevitability of language transition. Against these failures of parents and leaders, Thiessen invoked the will of God and thus imbued the language question with ultimate significance. If Mennonite Brethren were a German-speaking people by divine providence, and if God and Scripture both decreed that they remain faithful to the German language, there was only one possibility—everyone must recognize God's will and make every effort to obey. The delegates, however, did not immediately endorse Thiessen's analysis despite his invocation of the divinity. Thus, as early as 1947, consensus on the language question was impossible, even with such a heavy-handed attempt at manipulation. Thiessen was probably right that some leaders recognized the possibility, if not the probability, of a language change. It is important, however, to note that further action was taken away from Thiessen's committee and delegated to the Committee of Reference and Counsel. In Mennonite Brethren polity, this usually indicated that an issue was too divisive to be entrusted to anyone but primary leaders, who were expected to arrive at the best course of action through consultation.

A year later the Canadian Conference Committee of Reference and Counsel was ready to take direct action. Responding specifically to the language question as raised by F. C. Thiessen in 1949, the committee proposed a concrete Conference position on the language issue:

The Conference acknowledges that it is necessary to retain the German language and on these grounds asks the

congregations, as they are able, to institute Saturday-schools where students will receive the basics of German and religion. The Conference also asks congregational leaders, Sunday school leaders and teachers, and German-speaking teachers in the public schools to keep up the German as they are able, and asks parents to speak German with their children. Provincial conferences are also asked to support these endeavours.¹¹

This was followed by a recommendation to form a committee for the nurture of the German language, consisting of five men elected on staggered three-year terms. These would be charged with the task of stimulating the mastery of German through personal appearances and presentations or articles in the German papers. They would also help supply congregational Saturday German schools, high schools and Bible schools with suitable German books. Budgetary support was stipulated.

The language position and recommendations of the Committee of Reference and Counsel were accepted by a single motion and the ensuing election appointed the following committee members: D. K. Dürksen (Winnipeg, North End), H. Regehr (Winnipeg, North End), Johann Görtz (Black Creek, B. C.), A. H. Unruh (Winnipeg, North End) and H. H. Kornelsen (Coaldale). The people elected to this committee were strategic; D. K. Dürksen, H. Regehr and A. H. Unruh were ministers in the North End Winnipeg congregation, Conference leaders and well-known defenders of the German language. Thus, at least some front-ranking leaders did not fall under Thiessen's suspicious condemnation. This remained true for the life of the committee. An analysis of the committee roster over its lifetime indicates Manitoba's clear dominance from 1950 to 1958, and while candidates were found to represent Alberta for all thirteen years, and British Columbia for eleven years, there was never any representation from Saskatchewan. The committee and its mandate were largely the creation of *Russländer* or post-war immigrant passion, and did not reflect the sentiments of leading late *Kanadier*.

The German-retainers had kept up the pressure during

1949-50 as the Committee of Reference and Counsel was considering the fate of Thiessen's demands, and several important additional features of the pro-German argument emerged. In the months leading up to the convention of 1950, the *Rundschau* carried two letters imbued with a sense of deep urgency.¹² In a letter to the editor, J. J. Janzen of Plum Coulee, Manitoba, argued that Mennonites¹³ were losing their identity and separateness in the world. The difference between Christians, and especially Mennonites, on the one hand and the world and those of other faiths on the other, was diminishing. The reason was the failure of Mennonites to keep their hedge against the world—the German language—in good repair. For Janzen, failing to maintain this essential difference between Mennonites and the world, and even other believers, resulted in worldly foreign spirits being allowed free and open entry into the Mennonite community.¹⁴

The Janzen letter was merely the opening volley, preparing the way for a major statement on the need to rescue the German language. Gerhard Cornies, a teacher from Leamington, Ontario and newly settled in Canada in 1948, wrote an article in the *Rundschau* where he laid out an elaborate case for “rescuing” the German mother tongue.¹⁵ The articles contain much that was already familiar pro-German rhetoric but an important thesis was added. Cornies argued that the survival of Mennonite religion was directly contingent on retaining a clear Mennonite ethnic identity or “*Volkstum*,” and this *Volkstum* depended on efforts to ensure the continued primacy of the German language among Mennonites. The struggle to preserve the German language was actually a fight to retain Mennonite faith, and those leaders who spoke of the inevitability of a German-English transition failed to recognize this. It was the German language that helped to keep Mennonite doctrine pure. Indeed, he argued, *Volkstum* and *Konfession*, or peoplehood and religion, were inseparable and the loss of German would result in Mennonites losing their sense of identity and ultimately being absorbed by other ethnic identities and denominations. Furthermore, Cornies argued, every Mennonite must be proud to speak German because German was a better language than English. During the last century, German,

more than any other language, had been the means of enriching all the peoples of the earth both spiritually and intellectually. Cornies concluded with a detailed and concrete eleven-point action plan designed to ensure the healthy survival of the German language. No doubt the Committee of Reference and Counsel, as it prepared its recommendations to the 1950 convention, was keenly aware that writers such as Janzen and Cornies had captured the attention of the 7,000 *Rundschau* subscribers and their families.

Conflict and Threatening Alienation

The sense of crisis and conflict evoked by writers and speakers such as Anna Wiebe, F. C. Thiessen, J. J. Janzen and Gerhard Cornies was authentic and had only deepened with the onset of post-war Mennonite immigration. The Committee for the German Language confronted a formidable task, especially in the Sunday schools. English was used in more than 85 per cent of Saskatchewan Sunday schools. In British Columbia and Alberta, where English was used in 29 per cent and 14 per cent of Sunday schools respectively, the situation seemed to be worsening. Only Manitoba seemed somewhat resistant to change, at least in the Sunday school, with English used in only 9 per cent of its Sunday schools. The College also continued to be the focus of conflicting expectations. While H. F. Klassen announced two special Bible College German scholarships presented by the Christian Press board of directors, the student-run Home Missions Committee of the Bible College was reporting to the Conference in English,¹⁶ and the previous year, three College students had begun an English radio broadcast in Winnipeg called the Gospel Light Hour.

Coaldale's claim to language solidarity was belied in 1948 when the Coaldale Bible School faced its largest enrollment ever because of post-war immigration. A definite confrontation of languages ensued as half the classes were taught in German, the other half in English, and a former South American

student reported, "The Canadians stayed with their English, we with our German. It was very hard for us immigrants."¹⁷ Conflicting linguistic needs occasioned by German-speaking Mennonite immigration were further documented by I. W. Redekop reporting to the Conference in 1949. Language was the most critical problem facing the Sunday school, he said. Where Sunday school was conducted in English, the children and youth could no longer understand German preaching, but not all immigrant children could understand English.

Front-ranking leaders also began declaring themselves on the issue. While the Committee of Reference and Counsel was institutionalizing the fight for German, the chairman of the Canadian Conference Sunday School Committee was praising Saskatchewan with its 85 per cent English usage in Sunday school. Reporting on the 1950 Sunday school workers' conference, A. A. Kroeker made his position clear: "One of the main difficulties of the Sunday school is still the matter of language. Only Saskatchewan has solved this problem. The other provinces are still fighting the issue, although only weakly." His statistics were much more disturbing than the official figures being reported by the congregations and compiled by the Conference executive. In British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba two-thirds of the children received no instruction in German. In Ontario seven-eighths were without German instruction. Saskatchewan children received none. To Kroeker, a *Kanadier*, the issue was clear. "Either we recover the language for the children, or we older ones who expect to live another fifteen years longer, must learn English."¹⁸ His version of the situation revealed that conflict existed not only among provinces and leaders but also in their reporting of the facts.

The discrepancy between Kroeker's version and the official version may be explained by several factors. Undoubtedly, congregations were loath to report the full extent of English being used in their Sunday schools. It may even be possible that teachers were quietly switching to English as a matter of sheer survival in the classroom without telling their congregational leaders. Also, the official Sunday school reports generally in-

cluded German adult classes in their accounting of language use, and these German adult classes would, of course, cause Sunday schools to report their language usage as mixed. Kroeker was probably reporting a more accurate picture when he claimed that at least two-thirds of the children and youth Sunday school sectors were already English in 1950 because he was basing his estimate on direct contact with the teachers themselves at the workers' convention. Congregational reports, on the other hand, were always forwarded via the responsible leaders at arm's length from the actual work.

In 1951 the Committee for the German Language issued its first report. The very first sentence of its initial report indicates the nature of the debate the committee was forced to address. "We understand as a committee that one is not saved by language."¹⁹ The remainder of the report reiterated a six-point rationale for retaining and promoting the German language. Two arguments emerged in addition to the familiar points already documented. Genuine German-English bilingualism was a distinct advantage in mission and outreach efforts. German must be retained because recent immigration had made the conduct of Sunday worship in German mandatory. In the statistical report that followed, the discrepancy between the official figures²⁰ and the Kroeker report was again apparent. In its conclusion, the committee began a practice it followed almost invariably for a decade, the use of Bible texts in its pro-German exhortations. In this instance the committee asked that all the congregations, even as they worked to preserve the German language, place themselves under the text Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus."²¹ The delegates responded by "warmly" commending the mastery of the German language but stipulating that this must begin in the family and the Sunday school.

The committee appeared sensitive to the charge of confusing faith and language. It could have been assumed, in a Mennonite Brethren assembly, that salvation was not a matter of language, but still the committee felt constrained to offer such an assurance. Those ready to adopt English may have implied that

their more conservative brothers and sisters were indeed making language an article of faith. Certainly, the arguments of Janzen and Cornies would seem to justify their suspicion. Thus, it is noteworthy that the points defending the retention of German were thoroughly pragmatic. The conditions of success were also stated in practical terms and concluded with a balanced appeal for cooperation. This tempered tone reflected a genuine attempt by leaders to grapple with the problem in a sensitive manner despite strong personal feelings.

Such moderation was sorely needed because the threat of serious alienation was deepening. On the first afternoon of the 1951 convention *Rundschau* and *Jugendblatt* editor H. F. Klassen pointed out that over half of the youth groups were conducting themselves in English and warned:

Because the older brethren so badly want to retain German as the language of family, congregation and conference, we identify full-fledged church-membership, true faith, Mennonitism, conference loyalty, etc. with the German language. Because many by now have only an imperfect ability in German, we are in danger of crumbling. Despite my great love for the German, I love our youth still more, and I do not want any young Christians to step out of our ranks because of language. No method or program can serve to bridge such a crisis. Only love is able to show the elderly the way, and move the young to extraordinary effort and cooperation.²²

No longer was Klassen saying that converting youth work to English was sin. David Neuman, leader of the Ontario Youth Committee, agreed. The youth did not favour a radical break with German, but rather wanted a gradual transition to English. Moreover, they did not wish to abandon the congregation, but they did want more independence in their endeavours. They wanted a practical Christianity. They wanted evidence that Mennonite Brethren held to their teaching, not because it was Mennonite, but because it was biblical. The fact that in the September 1951 *Jugendblatt*, English items outnumbered Ger-

man by twenty-four to nineteen, shows that youth leaders like Klassen and Neuman were doing more than making speeches.

Klassen and Neuman were not alone as A. A. Kroeker, together with provincial Sunday school leaders, launched a new journal with an English name, the *M. B. S. S. Instructor*. Originating at the national Mennonite Brethren Sunday school convention held April 9-13, 1951, at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, Winnipeg, the paper received Conference sanction the next year. Produced in Latin typeface, the first issue of 1952 had nine English articles compared to two German, and the editorial by I. W. Redekop was in English.²³ The next issue used German headings for German pieces and the ratio of German to English articles was seven to fourteen although the first page, including the editorial by I. W. Redekop was all in German. Clearly, Sunday school leaders with men like A. A. Kroeker and I. W. Redekop in the vanguard, were moving to genuine bilingualism in recognition of the fact that much of the work was already being conducted in English.

It can be seen from the examples of the *Jugendblatt* and *M. B. S. S. Instructor* that the policy of bilingualism, or *Zweisprachigkeit* as it was now being called, seemed to be making slow progress. Another apparent sign of such progress came at the very end of the 1951 convention as the last item of business before adjournment. It was decided that the minutes of the next year's convention would be written in both languages. The result was that in the 1952 yearbook, 157 pages of German minutes were followed by a thirty-two page English version. Nevertheless, even this small concession became an occasion for division. The next year the matter was raised again. The German version of the discussion, recorded as it was by German Committee member secretary Henry Regehr, says that:

The question is raised whether we draft a full English minute book or just have an English portion as an appendix to the German book. After a long discussion, the following decision is arrived at: We cannot, in this year, yet see our way clear to preparing a full minute book in the English language; therefore, we restrict ourselves to

an English appendix to the German book.²⁴

The English version makes it clear that the matter was not raised as a question but as a positive motion by the English faction: "A motion to publish the proceedings of the 42nd Canadian Conference in English at the same price as the German booklets was defeated. An appendix of a summary of the proceedings in English shall be added to the German report."²⁵

The relevance of so trivial a matter as the language of the convention minutes might be questioned, but the issue was not trivial to the delegates involved. Pro-English delegates were making a very specific recommendation in line with their perspective on *Zweisprachigkeit*. They wanted dual editions of the Conference yearbook, German and English. The yearbooks were sold by the Christian Press and the motion stipulated that the books would be sold at the same price. Thus, acceptance of the motion would not involve any financial subsidy of the English edition. The motion appeared to be a balanced application of the policy of *Zweisprachigkeit* but was rejected by the German-retaining majority.

The German minute reveals that this motion generated another "long discussion." The Conference was in danger of allowing the language issue to divert it from its work and ministry. The German faction could not brook any appearance of formal or official accommodation to English that would put it on apparent parity with the "mother tongue." An increasing proportion of Mennonite Brethren decision makers, however—people who would be voted as delegates to national conventions—used English in their religious and churchly experience as well as their professional and social lives. In 1952, the Conference was unwilling to acknowledge this reality and extend official parity to something even as mundane as convention proceedings.

Bilingualism Re-defined and Alienation Confirmed

The resistance to bilingual Conference records is more understandable as one examines the actions of the pro-German

forces in 1951-52. Such an examination shows deep suspicion between old and young, between German and English. The prospect of a tolerant *Zweisprachigkeit* peacefully evolving into an Anglicized but authentic Mennonite Brethren religion continued to erode. For younger progressives *Zweisprachigkeit* meant a period of tolerant transition to English, but for conservatives it meant the retention of the German language as a permanent feature of Mennonite Brethren experience, and any perceived threat to this expectation was met with sharp and immediate resistance. The logic of German retention took on a new complexity as the ideal of *Zweisprachigkeit* became subject to at least three quite different interpretations. When the *Jugendblatt* was introduced, bilingualism was decidedly one-sided, almost a minimal concession granted the restive youth to ensure the continued dominance of German. For leaders such as A. A. Kroeker bilingualism had come to denote an authentic transition-phase on the way to an English-speaking Mennonite Brethren Church. In 1951-52, however, *Zweisprachigkeit* came to mean something quite different for the archconservatives. For these, to be bilingual meant one was capable of functioning normally in the language of society at large, that is, English, while also being quite at home in and loyal to a unilingual German-speaking Mennonitism. This radical separation of church and society based on language was clearly articulated by sixty-year-old Isaak Regehr of Coaldale.²⁶

Between May 1952 and May 1953 Regehr embarked on a single-handed crusade in aid of the German language, submitting five separate extended pieces for publication in the *Rundschau*. The first was a detailed description of how the Coaldale congregation conducted its German school, an apparent effort to present what Regehr considered a highly successful model to be emulated by others.²⁷ The second article, entitled "*Der Preis der Zweisprachigkeit*,"²⁸ was so long it extended over three installments.²⁹ This writing deserves special comment for several reasons. First, it interprets the principle of *Zweisprachigkeit* as being supportive of a unilingual German Mennonite Brethren Church. Bilingualism meant that Mennonite Brethren individuals would be able to use both German and English fluently, the

one being the language of church and religion and Mennonite community, and the other the language of external relations, the *Landessprache*. Second, Regehr appears to have been among the more extreme Mennonite Brethren spokespersons for the German faction. Because of the strength of his arguments, they may well have been repeated and embellished in congregational meetings all through the Canadian Conference over the next decade, as the fight to retain the German was finally taken from the conference floor to local membership meetings and fought out on the issue of Sunday morning worship. Third, Regehr well illustrates the practice of using biblical references and allusions to sanctify pro-German arguments and criticism of those who might be otherwise-minded.

Regehr confidently put Coaldale forward as an example. His first line reads, "Our bilingualism is worth a lot to us in Coaldale."³⁰ It had served Coaldale well in its first twenty-five years in Canada, especially in that it had kept young and old together. Summer school workers all presented their reports in fluent German. Baptism candidates presented their conversion stories in good German. Every Sunday the choir sang in good accent-free German. Bilingualism also explained why Coaldale had fewer problems with military service, mixed marriages, worldly after-weddings, drama productions and attendance at movies. Here Regehr recapitulated the earlier Janzen argument that German served as a vital hedge of protection against the encroaching world. The exclusive use of German in the congregation had protected Coaldale from many unwanted influences from outside.

Regehr's major proposal was a recommendation that Mennonites send people overseas to acquire the necessary expertise to make German a permanent and self-perpetuating feature of Mennonite life. The failure of Mennonite colleges to prepare and resource German schoolteachers meant that local congregations were forced to rely on their own devices. It was time for congregations to band together and pay the price of acquiring a much-needed transfusion of authentic and current German language and literature directly from Europe. In this

context Regehr clarified his interpretation of *Zweisprachigkeit*. For him, bilingualism demanded Mennonite German unilingualism in the home and congregation. He contended that children who did not speak German exclusively in the home were not prepared for either Saturday German school, or Sunday school. He protested against the implication in the 1949 Education Committee report and the 1950 Committee of Reference and Counsel report that parents should “also” speak German with their children. Speaking both English and German in the home could not promote bilingualism. Thus, Regehr revealed how he was using the term “bilingualism.” His first interest was not bilingualism as it was understood by the moderates, but the preservation of German. Regehr was so determined that High German be the only language of the home, that he proposed a kind of home inspection in the interest of linguistic purity. His authority for such intrusion into the family came from the Bible in the form of an allusion to Judges 7:9-11. The biblical reference was to the story of Gideon preparing for battle against the Midianites. Regehr exploited the passage in which God commanded Gideon to spy out the Midianites by going into their camp and listening to what they were saying. Regehr cited this text as biblical justification for the leaders of the congregation inspecting each home to determine if the language of family discourse was in fact High German.

In his conclusion Regehr allowed his readers to glimpse the pain he felt at the steady assimilation of English into congregational life. English was present everywhere—at church banquets, in evening programs, in sermons and in the congregational library. All such accommodation must be radically removed. Youth and Sunday school teacher resources should revert to German. Everything—books, poems, songs, sermons—all should be in German. Regehr demanded a unilingual German church; no accommodation should be made to include non-German-speaking converts. Mennonite congregations should restrict their vision for mission and outreach to German-speaking immigrants and Russians. Regehr’s vision appeared significantly out of step with the evangelistic impulse that had been animating

Saskatchewan young adult Mennonite Brethren since the 1930s, and had spread throughout the Canadian Conference.

Regehr was convinced that the price of bilingualism, such as sending someone to Europe, or preparing German elementary school teachers, was insignificant compared to the really great challenge—that of preparing the children in the home—and this was only possible by answering the basic question, “What did they really want?” Did Mennonites want to be like the heathen, even when the king took their sons and daughters, and the Lord no longer heard their prayers, and they cried to the Lord because of their king, whom they had chosen?³¹ Was capitulation inevitable? With an obvious allusion to Genesis 25:32, Regehr asked whether the birthright of a German heritage should be given up? Regehr rejected all such options, and claimed that giving up bilingualism was a crime against the young, the old and the church. Mennonites must persevere in the battle for the German language without regard to the cost, or the casualties, or the seeming hopelessness of their cause. By the end of his article, Regehr had adopted the mantle of the grieving messiah pronouncing judgment on a stubborn and recalcitrant people. Making explicit reference to the Christ of the passion story was pleading with his people, he made the crusade to keep Mennonite congregations completely German a cause of ultimate significance.

Having invoked the divinity against the accommodation of English in Mennonite faith and community, Regehr now proceeded to call Mennonite spiritual leaders to their God-appointed responsibility. Making a direct and extended appeal to P. M. Friesen as his authority,³² he argued that German-speaking elementary schools were vital to the health of the German Mennonite community. Church leadership must ensure that such schools serve this purpose. Regehr charged that passive support for these schools by ministers was not enough. Ministers must recognize that precisely this, the German religion school, was their great work and obligation. They must not be allowed to stand in the way of their followers in this regard. If church leadership would act as P. M. Friesen described, the state of Saturday

schools, the high schools and the colleges would be better.

In addition to his continuing determination to imbue his cause with divine sanction, Regehr seemed to exhibit two additional attitudes of great significance. Despite the generally conservative nature of the Coaldale congregation, he appeared to be profoundly alienated from his own religious leadership on the issue of the German language. The matter of language was so important that he was prepared to make it the test of faithfulness for the leadership of the church. Furthermore, it would seem that he suffered from a sense of personal threat. The surrounding non-Mennonite society represented the threatening barbarians, heathen hoards—and Mennonites prepared to pollute their faith and community with the language of these hoards were not far from committing apostasy.

For Regehr, the threat of accommodation to the English language was a matter of life and death. Only the miraculous intervention of God would prevent disaster. At the national scale, minority languages such as German, he said, were like stepchildren in comparison to national languages such as English. Thus, he saw the plight of the German language as analogous to that of Ishmael being sent into the desert with Hagar.³³ In the end God rescued and blessed Ishmael because of Hagar's prayers; in the same way God would also rescue and bless the bilingualism³⁴ of the Mennonites if they earnestly pled with God as Hagar had.

Regehr was neither a minister nor a deacon, but an articulate and observant layman in the Coaldale congregation. His views are probably a fair representation of older *Russländer* who had spent difficult years starting anew in a strange land, and working hard to establish their German-speaking Mennonite Brethren congregations at the centre of their new communities. Now that centre of their lives, based on *Deutsch und Religion*, was being eroded. Regehr was not an eccentric reacting from the fringe but a voice for those who felt themselves disenfranchized by the threatening language transition. The sermonic style, the biblical allusions, the inducement of guilt, and the suggestion that church elders conduct home inspections to root out the use

of English, could only have led his readers, supporters and detractors alike, to conclude that the cause of Mennonite faith and the cause of the German Mennonite heritage were being made one and the same. It is unlikely that anyone, even in the heat of a congregational or convention debate, would actually anathematize a pro-English fellow Mennonite Brethren, but given the injection of rhetoric such as this, the meta-message was clear. Those who questioned the goal of preserving Mennonite religion as permanently and exclusively German were in danger of apostasy against God, parents and congregation.

There is evidence that Regehr's views had at least some broader support. In the 1952 report of the Committee for the German Language, D. K. Dürksen presented the delegates with the results of a Conference-wide survey conducted by the committee. Those congregations that responded corroborated the views of Regehr. When asked for their counsel to the German Committee, nine demands emerged: (1) Congregational leadership must be recruited in favour of the German language; (2) the love of German books must be awakened; (3) greater influence must be exercised on the Bible College; (4) High-German must be the language of the family; (5) Sunday school must be conducted in German; (6) German schools must be financed by the local congregation; (7) mothers must speak German to their children; (8) only German should be used in the congregation and (9) less English should be taught in the Bible schools and College.

The sense of threat discernable in Isaak Regehr's writing was widely spread among readers of the *Rundschau*. A 1951 *Rundschau* article which appeared, uncharacteristically, in Latin type-face instead of the customary German gothic typeface,³⁵ prompted a letter to the editor by Fred Peters of Abbotsford, British Columbia, asking the *Rundschau* to consider using more of the Latin type-face.³⁶ Would it be better, he asked, if the children's stories were printed in Latin type and if some stories appeared in English? The letter ended with a final assurance that it was motivated only by concern for the welfare of youth and by support for the *Rundschau*. Other readers soon demonstrated

that they considered any use of the Latin typeface, which they associated with the English language, to be an unacceptable compromise.

In an editor's note, Klassen acknowledged that others had also expressed the same sentiments but that such a change must be the wish of a decisive majority of readers. Thus, he invited readers to respond.³⁷ Peters' suggestion and Klassen's invitation elicited a firestorm of protest. Between April 9 and June 25, the *Rundschau* published sixty-one letters, thirty-five of which addressed the typeface issue. Only one took a mediating position; all others were protests and appeals to retain the Gothic typeface.

Neither Peters nor editor Klassen had intimated that the use of Latin typeface was a prelude to the *Rundschau* becoming an English paper. Yet the sense of threat among *Rundschau* readers was so high that many concluded that this indeed was the real issue. For *Rundschau* readers Latin type was associated with English, and no such change could be countenanced. The controversy also highlighted a definite generational tension. Some older Mennonites seemed to be experiencing a profound sense of alienation from their religious community. Also remarkable is the number of such responses from Saskatchewan where the process of becoming "*verenglisched*" was most advanced. While it is possible that letters supportive of Peters were received by the *Rundschau*, none were published. It is unlikely that Klassen would have suppressed one side of the debate. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that the pro-English side was not interested in making the *Rundschau* typeface Latin.

These letters represent authentic pro-German voices speaking out of the benches, as it were. The sentiments of the elderly are reflected in a letter from Coaldale written by eighty-four year old J. D. Unger. Unger read the *Rundschau* regularly in Russia and now wanted to retain the familiar, native and homey, Gothic typeface. He would cancel his subscription of it were to be changed.³⁸ The threat to cancel subscriptions was repeated often.

From Saskatchewan, "N. L." wrote, "Even if we elderly do not understand English and are unable to read Latin script, we

still want to attain to salvation.”³⁹ The elderly felt themselves bereft of spiritual nurture and abandoned now that *everything* in their beloved church had become English. Where should they find encouragement in their old age? The letter ended with an entreaty not to take away their last German paper.

Readers often exhorted Klassen to remain true to his role as defender of the German language. Some used Scripture to buttress their cause. “K. K.” of Didsburg, Alberta called Klassen to account for the defense of the mother tongue by quoting I Corinthians 4:2: “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” The writer cited Klassen’s signature to a March 5 proposal for an inter-Mennonite association for the retention of German.⁴⁰ In a similar vein, eighty-year old Anna Janzen of Ravendale, Saskatchewan wrote, “Whoever is unable, or better, unwilling, to read the *Rundschau* because of the Gothic type-face, won’t read it in Latin type either. Therefore, hold fast to the German.”⁴¹ She concluded by quoting Psalm 119:33, “Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end.” Katharina Schartner of Leamington, Ontario wrote that surely the younger people could take the effort to read German. Why should the elderly learn English when it was so much more difficult for them?⁴²

The typeface issue elicited comment on the full range of the language controversy, including the vital issue of bilingualism. A strong, even angry expression on the subject of bilingualism was offered by “P. B.” It was naïve to think that changing the typeface of the *Rundschau* from Gothic to Latin would restore youthful readership. The real problem, he contended, was that Mennonite children refused to read German—period! His own children, who were able to handle the Gothic well, were interested neither in the youth page of the *Rundschau* nor in the *Jugendblatt*, even though it was mixed in language. His point was that half measures such as mixing the languages were useless. The choice was absolute, either all German, or all English! Either the *Rundschau* should remain in Gothic print—or there should be no *Rundschau* at all!⁴³

Not all the letters were angry, however. Johann J. Kröker

of Herbert, Saskatchewan provided an example of the gentle pathos evident in many of them:

I would strongly favour the *Rundschau* still being printed in the German letters for a long time. I like to read the obituaries but if they are in English they are useless to me. I love the English language but we should hold to the German. How difficult it is for us older German people when we sit in a German congregation and a younger German Mennonite stands up and preaches the entire service to a German-speaking congregation in English. Often I feel like crying and complaining but this is a punishment from God and therefore we should repent before Him. Now, God bless us, and you as well. In the love of Jesus....⁴⁴

The single mediating opinion published came from J. Janzen of Mount Lehman, British Columbia. "How could the *Rundschau* best fulfill its mandate?" he asked. While it was true that most of the elderly could only read the Gothic print, most middle-aged people could read both while younger people were only able to read Latin print. Including some Latin typeface on the youth page would only be consistent with the motto appearing on the masthead of the paper, "Let us be diligent to preserve unity of spirit." Thus, in view of the aim of the *Rundschau* to preserve unity and in view of its mandate as a mission-paper, it was necessary for everyone to yield their personal opinions to the good of all.⁴⁵ Editor Klassen, however, had heard enough to make up his mind, and one voice of moderation could not counter the clamour of protest. In the June 4 issue he laid the controversy to rest with the promise that the *Rundschau* would retain the Gothic type face and would remain German—at least as long as the present level of subscription remained.⁴⁶

Amidst this controversy a concrete proposal that the German language be rescued by an inter-Mennonite coalition was put forward. In March 1952 a detailed plan appeared in the *Rundschau* underwritten by an inter-Mennonite group of four leaders.⁴⁷ Under the motto, "Strength in Unity," the four proposed to test the amount of public Mennonite support for the re-

tention of the German language and then mobilize that support in a last-ditch all-out effort. Their motivation was plain:

What is at stake if the German is lost? The loss of a language, especially tragic when it is one's mother tongue. Losing German will mean being separated from the soil that nurtures our culture. Our good traditions, our most noble cultural treasures are being lost. German songs, poetry, good faith will be lost. Inherited customs and habits, genuineness of perception and the striving after ideals are in retreat. Torn loose from the stem of mother tongue we all become like a leaf blown in the wind, and this especially in the sphere of religion. Do we not have enough objective evidence of this already?

It is said that the salvation of the soul is more important than the rescuing of the language. Of course! But who would be ready to contend that learning one's mother tongue would hinder one's salvation? Isn't the opposite more likely the case? To keep a firm grasp of one's mother tongue is an act of good faith; we are squandering the trust given us by God. If we are faithful in the sphere of our language, we will also find it easier to keep faith in the sphere of religion. We should claim the right of all other peoples to retain our own religion and our own mother tongue. It is natural that our children will not speak our language if we do not teach them.⁴⁷

Here was the best-reasoned rationale the pro-German movement could muster. Mennonites must keep their German because it was a sacred trust of culture and faith, given them by God. While it was not to be equated with ultimate religious concerns such as one's personal salvation, to be faithless in guarding one's mother tongue was also to place one's Spiritual heritage at grave risk. This clarion call to a united defense rallied the forces and in October 1952 the Mennonitischen *Verein zur Pflege der deutschen Muttersprache in Kanada*⁴⁸ was launched—its goals, strategies and philosophy all duly documented in the *Rundschau*.⁴⁹

At the convention in July of 1952 there was a definite clash among Mennonite Brethren on the issue of language. The younger *Russländer* and their children had already begun to adopt English as their first language during the war, and by the early fifties English was well on the way to becoming their language of religious expression and spiritual experience as well. At the same time older *Russländer* woke up to the serious possibility that in their own lifetime, they would be attending Mennonite Brethren congregations in which there would be less and less, and finally, almost no German. They would have become completely *verenglisched*.⁵⁰ The period from the mid-1950s to 1965, when English became the official working language of Canadian Mennonite Brethren, represents two developments. The pro-German faction found itself fighting an increasingly rear-guard action on the issue, and being driven more and more to the realization that they would not even be able to salvage a genuine bilingualism. During these same years, the struggle for the German language lost its place on the Conference agenda, and instead was fought out in sometimes-bitter confrontation in the local congregation. It was in the local setting, as language transition threatened the central experience of faith, Sunday morning worship and preaching, that English became most threatening. Thus, German music, and especially the German sermon, the centrepiece of Mennonite Brethren worship, became the final symbol of the linkage between faith and language.

Hope, Disillusionment and Surrender

The decade between 1952 and 1962 saw a marked reversal of the status of the German language in the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference. In 1952 those defending German were hopeful and determined. Ten years later, however, the Conference accepted a formal motion that German and English be equally acceptable languages for convention proceedings and discussion.¹ The next year the Committee of Reference and Counsel acted on a request from the Committee for the German Language and recommended its dissolution; the recommendation was accepted.² Ironically, at the same convention the English-language *Mennonite Brethren Herald* was designated as "our official Conference paper."³ Finally, in 1964 the Committee of Reference and Counsel broached a change in the official working language of the Conference, and the delegates agreed that beginning in 1965, minutes would be written and read in English and translated into German. Both the German and English yearbooks would be considered official Conference documents.⁴ Thus, officially and institutionally, Canadian Mennonite Brethren had become English after a process reaching back more than a generation.

The Watershed Year, 1952

The efforts at persuasion, pressure and organization that led up to the decisive summer of 1952 indicate, in retrospect, that this was the time of greatest effort to retain the German language. That summer also marked the beginning of German's eventual demise as the language of the Mennonite Brethren as the thirteen years leading up to 1965 witnessed the gradual retreat of the pro-German faction before a growing realization; German would not continue as the preferred carrier and inter-

preter of Mennonite Brethren faith, worship and decision making. The watershed year in the fight for the German language in the Conference as a whole had been 1952, and the congregational case studies to follow will show that by 1953 the frequency of language-related developments increased dramatically. Thus, the events and forces of 1952 merit special analysis.

The German Committee had to assimilate some bad news in 1952. One plank in the program to recover the German language was the goal of Bible schools enhancing their German programs to supply Mennonite Brethren Bible College with students better prepared in German studies. At the 1952 convention, however, it was revealed that of the nine Bible schools, three were half-German and half-English in their instruction, and that the amount of German in Bible school programs ranged down to one school that was completely English.⁵ Instead of German increasing its status in the Bible schools, the trend was in the opposite direction. Conference secretary Henry Regehr also reported that only about 20 per cent of Canadian Mennonite Brethren high school children had the opportunity to receive formal instruction in the German language, and the Sunday school report had no better comfort for the pro-German faction. A. A. Kroeker reported that 30 per cent of Sunday school students were discontinuing attendance in the intermediate and senior departments and that the use of German in Sunday school had declined by 7 per cent in the previous year alone.

These trends explain why the hopes of the German faction were ultimately pinned on the home and the congregational German school. The careful statistics kept on the performance of German schools by Henry Regehr provide a good index of the effectiveness of the campaign to recover the language. Measured in these terms, the Committee for the German Language rode a very short burst of support at its inception and then suffered a slow decline. 1951-52 proved to be the period of maximum congregational support across the Conference for the German school idea. About 39 per cent, or thirty-one out of eighty congregations conducted such a school that year. By 1966 the number of German schools had declined to twelve out of 119

congregations, or 10 per cent. Thus, the 1952 German Committee report becomes an important high water mark for the Mennonite Brethren congregational German school movement.

When the provinces were ranked by the number of schools compared to the number of congregations, British Columbia (twelve of thirteen) and Ontario (five of six) were in the forefront. Alberta came next with four of seven while Manitoba, because of the provision for German instruction in rural district schools, had only six of twenty-two congregations with a German school. These were mainly in Winnipeg, which would not tolerate such concessions in view of the multi-ethnic nature of the city. As might be expected, none of the sixteen Saskatchewan congregations reported a school.

The mere existence of a congregational German school, however, did not ensure success; attendance was a second concern. Furthermore, the sheer number of students in itself was also not the most significant factor. German schools needed to be successful in making a majority of a congregation's children proficient in German. Only then could a uniform German Sunday school program be effective. This vital requisite was never met. Congregations were required to account annually for the attendance at their German schools and for their Sunday school attendance by departments. Knowing that the typical age of attendance at German school was six to fourteen, it is possible to estimate the amount of parent and child support and/or the effectiveness of congregational enforcement of German school attendance.

Yarrow and Coaldale were the two largest congregations in Canada in 1952. In 1952 Yarrow reported 198 children enrolled in German school while its records show 327 children between the ages of six and fourteen enrolled in Sunday school. By this measure, Yarrow had 61 per cent of its potential in German school. This was its peak attendance measured against potential. It was only able to report attendance better than 50 per cent in four additional years, all between 1949 and 1954. In 1954 attendance dropped below 40 per cent of potential and by 1962 fewer than one in three children were in German school.

Coaldale's record was somewhat more erratic than Yarrow's. Two years showed extraordinarily high attendance when compared with potential. These are 1950 with 90 per cent attendance and 1960 with just over 80 per cent. Except for these two years, Coaldale's attendance never exceeded two-thirds of its potential, 1957 representing the lowest point with less than a third of the potential enrolling. By way of contrast, Kitchener represents an interesting variation in that it was an urban congregation in Ontario. A much smaller congregation with a 1952 membership of 302, Kitchener shows a dramatic increase in German school enrollment in 1953, jumping from 38 per cent (twenty of fifty-three potential students) in 1952 to 85 per cent. This enrollment, however, was not sustained because in 1954 the attendance was down to 42 per cent, with thirty children of a possible seventy-two attending German school. Only twice in the sixteen years between 1947 and 1962 did more than half of the potential Kitchener German school students actually enroll. Viewed from the vantage point of 1952 these figures must have encouraged the Committee for the German Language because there seemed to be an increase in German school attendance coincident with the commencement of its own work. As the decade wore on, however, there was a rapid decline. This trend is thoroughly corroborated by similar evidence in the Sunday school and in youth programs.

In 1952 official Conference statistics indicated that English was already being reported as a language of instruction in close to 50 per cent of the Sunday schools. It has already been shown that those less committed to the status quo, and closer to the Sunday school work of the congregations, considered the proportion of English usage to be much higher. By 1957 the actual picture was undeniable; English was being used in more than 80 per cent of the congregational Sunday schools, and very nearly 40 per cent were completely English. The actual relative status of German and English in the local congregation is even more clearly revealed in Henry Regehr's youth statistics. If it is valid to assume that congregational authority exerted a reasonable amount of control over the Sunday school and the German

school, then it is there, where children and youth were essentially passive objects of the programming decisions, that German would be easiest to maintain. A truer picture can be discerned from youth data because the young people were increasingly less amenable to control and manipulation by their elders. Percentages published for the Conference as a whole indicate that in 1952 just over one-third of the congregations were reporting their youth programs as all German. Six years later this proportion had dropped to an infinitesimal 1.4 per cent and over half of the programs were admitted to be totally English. When figures for ten sample congregations are compared,⁶ the two Saskatchewan congregations, Herbert and Hepburn, were declaring their youth programs all English by 1949. Coaldale, Alberta and South Abbotsford, British Columbia were the last of the ten to admit to more English than German, reporting that in 1959 they were 80 per cent and 100 per cent English respectively. The profiles of Coaldale and Yarrow show a precipitous decline in the reported use of German with the former lagging a little behind the latter.

Finally, this survey indicates that some congregations found themselves with a division of language according to the venue of their youth program. Three congregations reported that they had a German *Jugendverein* and an English *Jugendabend*; these were South Abbotsford in 1954-55, and North End-Elmwood and South End-Portage Avenue, Winnipeg in 1956. Another kind of bilingualism had developed in the congregations as youth work was being carried on in two spheres. Originally, youth work had been confined to the *Jugendverein*, usually translated "Christian Endeavour," a monthly program planned by the youth and presented to the congregation at large. The *Jugendverein* was oriented more towards service than toward the spiritual nurture and Christian education of the youth themselves. By the 1950s another aspect of youth program had developed; this was congregational *Jugendarbeit*, or youth work. Frequently, this too was service-oriented but aimed at groups outside the congregation. Extension mission Sunday schools, tract distribution, and summer vacation Bible schools, all con-

ducted by young adults, were a common expression of this work. Usually this work was conducted in English, while the congregation, of course, still expected to be served with monthly German programs presented by the *Jugendverein*. This produced an increasing frustration among the youth. Formerly, German had been the *Umgangssprache* of the youth as well, and any program they generated naturally rose out of their common German culture and language, but now their *Umgangssprache* was English and they were being asked to present *Jugendverein* programs in what was increasingly, for them, their second language.

It is evident that just as the Committee for the German Language and its vocally emotional supporters were making their most impassioned appeals, the evidence was rapidly accumulating that the youth of the Conference were overwhelmingly electing to reject German. By the latter half of the 1950s a very high proportion of Canadian Mennonite Brethren youth had received not only their secular education but also much of their religious formation in the English language. For them it was no longer a matter of consciously choosing English over German as a language of religious expression and spiritual experience because their religious language had become English. Now the crucial choice lay with the local congregation. Would it yield and serve its youth fully in English, or would it side with an older generation claiming inability to function in English religiously? Would Mennonite Brethren youth be effectively disenfranchised from a full experience of congregational life? The choice was most difficult to make in connection with Sunday morning services.

In contrast to the Committee for the German Language, other Conference leaders already knew in 1952 what the future was likely to reveal. H. F. Klassen and H. P. Töws, former chairman of the College Committee, admitted to the General Conference that before long a large portion of Canadian Mennonite Brethren readers would prefer an English rather than a German Conference paper and people should prepare themselves for the eventuality of a Canadian English-language Mennonite Brethren paper.⁷ Canadian youth leaders also were in touch with

how far the transition to English had actually progressed. While F. C. Peters defended the policy that the *Jugendblatt* use both languages equally, he did so because the paper also served the needs of overseas readers. This pragmatic justification of continued German was far from the determined defense sought by the pro-German faction. The way of the future was shown in September of 1952 with the first issue of the *Youth Worker*, published under the editorship of Walter and Katie Wiebe and sponsored by the Youth Committee of the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Canada, chaired by F. C. Peters. Aiming to be a monthly source of inspiration and help for youth workers, the first issue was completely in English as was the overwhelming majority of future issues.

In the face of these developments, pro-German Mennonite Brethren from Manitoba had at least one reason to hope. The regional meetings of the new inter- *Mennonitischer Verein Deutsche Muttersprache*⁸ seemed well attended, and membership, at an annual fee of one dollar per person, was growing. The late winter Steinbach meeting reported a membership of 550.⁹ Several months later at Altona, the *Verein* announced its membership at 635, and by August 1953 *Verein* chairman G. H. Peters reported a membership of 800. This apparently enthusiastic response of Manitoba to the *Verein* appeared to offer the Manitoba-dominated Committee for the German Language an invaluable ally. In 1953 the Committee for the German Language reported that it had done "little direct work" but was working along with the *Verein* "*Deutsche Muttersprache*" and proposed that in the future the promotion of German should be done in cooperation with this society. In this year, the committee had been placed second to last on the agenda with the result that the report was not presented at the convention at all because of a time shortage.

This underscores the reality disclosed by the data of the German schools, the Sunday schools and the youth programs. By the time the German Language Committee had been established, the issue was already beginning to die and the Conference was not willing to be preoccupied by the language question.

Front-ranking Conference leadership had more important things to do, as only Henry Regehr of the executive took any active public part in the German language rescue campaign. In 1954, when its report was again second last on the agenda, the committee felt constrained to recommend its continued existence on the grounds of being an important link between the *Verein* and Mennonite Brethren. In this context, the committee cited the Mennonite Brethren active in *Verein* leadership. A. H. Unruh, H. F. Klassen, D. K. Dürksen and Dr. N. Neufeld served on the executive and H. Regehr was "working along."¹⁰ Notable for their absence from a list of *Verein* activists are younger emerging Mennonite Brethren leaders like J. A. Toews, H. H. Voth, F. C. Peters or even the somewhat older I. W. Redekopp of North End-Elmwood.

Ironically, as the committee was taking comfort from the *Verein*, the first flush of enthusiasm for the *Verein* was suffering the same fate as the early Mennonite Brethren rally to the cause of its own German Committee. In July 1954 D. K. Dürksen reported active *Verein* membership at 695, and in December he reported a membership of over 1,000. This figure, however, must be qualified by chairman G. H. Peters' September admission that 450 *Verein* members had failed to renew their initial one dollar membership fees despite repeated appeals in the Mennonite German-language press. Dürksen's boast of a *Verein* a thousand strong included a significant proportion of inactive members. Thus, the motivational appeal being used by the leaders of the pro-German campaign yielded a strong early response but soon found support was on the wane. A year after its formation, the *Verein* had failed to retain a third of its original support, and by 1956 its membership had dwindled to 310.¹¹

Still Attempting to "Regulate the Situation"

While the German language issue was less prominent on the Mennonite Brethren Conference floor, it was not resolved. The keynote address at the 1954 convention was delivered by B.

B. Janz who riveted the delegates' attention on the eight most serious shortcomings of the Canadian Conference. Shortcoming number five was the language problem:

The language problem in our congregations in Canada is a very serious matter. It can cause the elderly much pain and perhaps much carelessness in the congregation. However, it need not be a problem or a crisis if all else concerning the young and the old were sound and spiritual. When both sides are spiritual, then it is possible, with wise direction, to regulate the situation. In this matter, one should proceed very cautiously, but never should one force the issue to the breaking point. How sad it is, when mother and child, because of a Babylonian confusion, are no longer able to understand one another.¹²

Here was an appeal for moderation and considerate accommodation while acknowledging that Mennonite Brethren faced a very serious problem. More importantly, Janz did not regard the language problem as the root of other crises in the Conference; rather, if the greater spiritual health of the community were maintained, then the language problem would not be as severe. In this instance, Janz did not seem to confuse faith and language, indicating that the issue of spiritual well being was prior to linguistic considerations. Nevertheless, his pastoral heart was moved as he observed generational and familial estrangement because of the failure to "regulate the situation" adequately.¹³ During the 1950s and 60s progressive Mennonite Brethren leaders continued their efforts to manage the stress of language transition, hoping to prevent an overt rupture in the community of faith. This was a very sensitive task because the strain was now being felt at the heart of Mennonite Brethren experience.

Janz' pastoral lament reflected the impact of the language issue on the twin centres of Mennonite Brethren religious life: the home and the Sunday morning worship service. There is no direct engagement with language and worship in the institutional record at the Conference level, but the matter of German and English language hymnals shows that Mennonite Brethren wor-

ship was also beginning to experience tension. In 1952 the *Gesangbuchkomitee* of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference published the *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde*.¹⁴ Two years after publishing the *Gesangbuch*, the Music Committee was tacitly admitting that the new German hymnal was not meeting congregational needs, and was explicitly commending the new American Mennonite Brethren *Church Hymnal*.¹⁵ Tacit acknowledgment in 1954 became frank admission in 1955, "Our choirs sing in both languages. This is necessary because we have people in our services and in our evangelistic meetings from English-speaking neighbourhoods who also want to understand the meaning of our music."¹⁶ In its recommendations the committee agreed with *Gesangbuch* editor, Ben Horch, that the Canadian German hymnal should be translated into English as soon as possible. By 1960 Canadian Mennonite Brethren pews were displaying two hymnals, the *Gesangbuch*—black and in German—and *The Hymn Book*—gray and in English—with the hymns and numbers matching exactly. The dream of bilingualism had, in a fashion, finally come to pass.

This is not to say that the project had proceeded unhindered. A year before the actual publication, the committee was still defending the project because some believed it unnecessary; Mennonite Brethren already had the English *Church Hymnal*. The rationale offered in defense of the translation indicated a concern to preserve the old German heritage. Because many of the German hymns had not been previously translated, the specific aim of the committee was to retain the German songs in English versions. Furthermore, the committee envisioned that the language transition would be especially marked in the next five to ten years, and the committee wanted both hymnals available to the congregations through this period.¹⁷

In his foreword to *The Hymn Book*, Canadian Conference moderator D. J. Pankratz documented the reasons for B. B. Janz' pastoral concern:

First, the German hymnal did not and could not satisfactorily serve all our churches because of the growing language problem. Second, it was highly desirable that the

treasured hymns in the German "Gesangbuch" be preserved for future generations. Third, it was strongly felt that the translated hymnal would make its own distinct contribution to furthering spiritual unity in our churches.¹⁸

Several points are clear. The decision to produce a bilingual worship resource was based on the realization that the policy of bilingualism would ultimately become obsolete. The English version was produced as a musical salvage project looking forward to the time when Mennonite Brethren would have forgotten their German, and so have lost their ability to enjoy the rich tradition of German Mennonite hymnody in its original language. Second, already in 1955 English had not only made inroads into Mennonite Brethren worship but was endangering the "spiritual unity" of the congregations.

Janz and Pankratz were not the only leaders to warn of growing disunity. At the annual convention of the previous year Mennonite Brethren had held a mass Sunday school rally in St. Catharines, Ontario. Isaac Ewert of Kitchener, principal of the Bible school in Ontario, addressed the congregation on the text Matthew 24:45-47. Ewert expounded on the "The Splintering of our Congregational Education Program," saying he did not attribute the threat of disunity or fragmentation to language, but to the trend of younger members being increasingly preoccupied with interests and pursuits outside the sphere of congregational life, implying that some were treating the program of the church as a once-a-week occasion. This, he said, was driving a wedge between young and old.¹⁹ Later in the same program, however, I. W. Redekopp, newly appointed leader of the North-End congregation in Winnipeg, did make a direct link between the language problem and the threat of congregational disunity. "In today's Sunday school," he warned, "language is not our hobby horse, but rather our problem, in that we find ourselves as a conference in a transitional period. Unless we prepare for this transition it is certain that there will be a separation."²⁰ Assuming the inevitability of a language transition, Redekopp only asked whether it would be peaceful or painful. Progressive Mennonite

Brethren leaders were beginning to fear that the language issue could lead to schism.

While language was threatening to divide Mennonite Brethren, other signs of alienation were also emerging. Some Mennonite Brethren lost patience with the slow pace of transition and were electing to leave the denomination. In 1955 Henry Regehr raised a question, "The number of those who leave Mennonite Brethren congregations for other denominations is getting greater. Why? Are these people not finding a spiritual home in their own congregation?"²¹ The next year Regehr reported that seventy-seven members out of an initial 1955 membership of 12,514 had voluntarily left the Mennonite Brethren for other denominations.²² Regehr had already been tracking this phenomenon for some time. In 1948 he began asking congregations to report the number of members asking for transfer to non-Mennonite Brethren churches and in 1951 he asked for the names of the denominations such exiting members were joining. Results began to document an increasing number of members choosing to leave the Conference. Between 1951 and 1955, 281 members chose to leave voluntarily. In the next five years this figure increased 46 per cent to 525. Between 1961 and 1965 the number leaving increased 24 per cent to 689, and between 1966 and 1970 another 27 per cent to 944. From 1971 to 1975, 767 were reported leaving while the figure for the period 1976 to 1980 was 1,251. The report for 1971-75 must be qualified because there was no report published for 1975. In all 4,457 members were reported leaving in the thirty years surveyed. These represent the equivalent of eighteen moderately sized congregations of 250 members each. In the thirteen-year career of the Committee for the German Language 1,065 transferring members were reported joining non-Mennonite Brethren congregations. Without more intensive congregational research it is not possible to say definitely that this exodus is directly attributable to the language issue but it is probable that there was some connection.

While some members were despairing of change and leaving the denomination, the Christian Press chose 1955 to undertake its own regulating measure in pursuit of an orderly tran-

sition. Managing editor H. F. Klassen was able to experiment without consulting Conference delegates because Mennonite Brethren ownership of the Press, which distributed the *Rundschau*, was at arm's length. The Christian Press reported annually to the Canadian Conference through Klassen, but it was directly accountable to its Mennonite Brethren shareholders, not the Conference. Klassen's new initiative was a new weekly English family paper offered to the Mennonite community in September 1955, and summarily introduced to the Conference as very well received in Mennonite homes in 1956. The name of the new paper, the "*Mennonite Observer*," was a virtual translation of "*Mennonitische Rundschau*." Klassen especially recommended the *Observer* for those homes where children no longer read German except under duress and announced that a combined subscription price for both papers was being offered.²³

In the first editorial of the *Observer*, Klassen addressed the question, "Why, then, start a new paper, —and an English one at that?" His reply was:

Because the purpose and ministry of the Christian Press, Ltd. is to supply our homes with Christian family papers, we must accomplish this in whatever language the respective generation preferably uses. The need for an English weekly paper in the spirit of the *Mennonitische Rundschau* has become greater and the demand for it more urgent during these last few years. With God's help we wish to serve all age groups of our brotherhood in both languages.²⁴

A newspaper, Klassen continued "must have close ties to our past, and lead creatively into the future." He concluded by introducing Leslie Stobbe as the *Observer's* editor.

The introduction of the *Observer* as a companion to the *Rundschau* certainly had the appearance of *Zweisprachigkeit* although there was no attempt to make the *Observer* a mere English translation of the *Rundschau*. If there was the appearance of bilingualism, it was of a different sort than earlier proposed. *Zweisprachigkeit* played no part in the initial rationale for the *Observer*. The prevailing tone was one of transition. Nor did

the *Observer* want to engage the German-English controversy directly. The intent of the paper was to inform, instruct and inspire younger Mennonite readers already committed to the faith. Comment was most often of an exhortative and inspirational nature. One exception was the immediate introduction of a feature on the editorial page entitled, "Through the Looking-Glass." Its aim was "to point out weaknesses and suggestions for improvement in society and policy." It was a column dedicated "to an inward look, to an appraisal of the dangers threatening us, and to constructive proposals for meeting these dangers."²⁵ This "no ostrich policy," as the editorial was headlined, was not extended to the language question.

In the November 11, 1955, issue of the *Observer*, Walter Neufeld of Winnipeg used the "Looking Glass" to address the language problem, providing a rare example of pro-English argumentation. His question was, "Should we, or should we not, use the English or the German language in our Mennonite churches?"²⁶ Neufeld's stance was soon evident:

Any church, no matter what the denomination, was not built as a monument to tradition. They were built as temples of God; a place where people could go to pray, to worship God and to study the Scriptures. The manner in which it is done, or the language used, is of little significance—if the congregation does not understand what is being said. For Luther that meant translating the Bible into German. For Tyndale it meant translating it into English.²⁷

The editor steadfastly refused to rise to the bait:

We would prefer not to have an extended debate on this subject, for it usually generates more heat than light. However, if someone feels he can make a truly worthwhile suggestion we will not ignore it. It might be well to remember that the truth usually lies in the middle, not at the two extremes.²⁸

Apparently, the issue was too hot to handle and the emotions aroused would not be in keeping with the intent of the fledgling paper to edify. The *Observer* was an attempt to prepare for the

inevitable transition to English but it was not intended to speed the process, or be used as an instrument in that direction. The concern of the leaders was to keep the predictions of schism from coming true. Klassen was still trying to adhere to his rule of the "golden mean."

Paying the Price of Transition

The inauguration of the *Observer* appears to have been a trial balloon testing Mennonite Brethren acceptance of an official English-language periodical. The *Observer's* launch also began a very complicated series of actions intended to help finance an English-language Mennonite Brethren periodical. Ten years earlier, the newly formed Committee of Reference and Counsel had spearheaded the adoption of the Christian Press to encourage the retention of German. Cost had not been an issue then; people were willing to pay to preserve the tongue of their mothers. Now, as the process of Conference transition neared completion, they were less willing to bear the cost of hearing Mennonite Brethren officially speaking the language of their children. This struggle, however, was only symptomatic of a much dearer price being paid in Mennonite Brethren families and congregations.

A December 12, 1956, meeting of the Committee of Reference and Counsel, the Youth Committee and the Christian Press produced a proposal which ultimately served as the seed of a highly controversial and long-protracted process.²⁹ This initiative of the "leading brethren" led to a May 1957 meeting with the Conference executive, representatives of Christian Press and the Canadian Conference Publications Committee to address the problem of unnecessary duplication of publications.³⁰ In these discussions the final version of a proposal was drafted for Conference decision at the 1957 convention. The main points of the proposal called for the amalgamation of the *Jugendblatt* and the *Observer* into a single English-language Conference weekly aimed at children and youth, and the hiring of an editor at Conference expense. If the proposal was accepted, then an editorial

board should be appointed to supervise the periodical. The annual cost of the project not including the salary of the editor was estimated at \$10,000. The proposal was accepted.

From the outset, Publications Committee chairman David Ewert was concerned about the cost of the project, hinting that if the Christian Press were wholly acquired by the Conference, the issue of cost would be partially alleviated.³¹ His nervousness about the willingness of Mennonite Brethren to pay the price of an English-language publication was justified—in the end, it took five long years of wrangling to secure the publication of an English periodical for Canada. The price was the complete acquisition of the Christian Press by the Conference, apparently to help fund the English paper from the profits of its other successful ventures, including the *Rundschau*. The other intangible cost, resulting from the failure to achieve consensus on the Conference floor, was the intrusion of the English periodical issue directly into the already volatile language transition process in local congregations. Along the way, the Canadian Conference and the North American General Conference again demonstrated that they were unable to cooperate on language-related projects of mutual interest.

As the 1957 convention continued, it was confirmed that providing an English periodical and a Christian Press buy-out were connected, as the Committee of Reference and Counsel asked delegates to approve a Canadian Conference acquisition of the remaining 80 per cent of the Christian Press shares. A recommendation to this effect was presented by the trustees of the Conference, but anticipating that this would be controversial, the Committee of Reference and Counsel recommended that the proposal be presented to all the congregations before the next annual convention.³² This caused the earlier decision to proceed with an English-language Conference organ to be reviewed again, and implementation was delayed. The *Jugendblatt* would still be discontinued but the Press would continue to supply the *Observer* for another year.³³ The Youth Committee, anticipating even more difficulty, recommended that if it was not possible to join the *Jugendblatt* and the *Observer* in 1958, then the Canadian

Conference should take steps to publish an English-language family paper. The Youth Committee was challenging the Conference to re-affirm its decision in principle about the issue of an English Conference periodical. The recommendation was finally accepted and it appeared that the Canadian Conference had again committed itself to an English Conference periodical.

At the 1957 General Conference convention, the issue of launching an English periodical became even more complicated. The General Conference Board of Publications report revealed that the *Zionsbote* was running an annual deficit of \$6,000 while *The Christian Leader* was \$3,000 in arrears. Obviously, both General Conference publications were in trouble. While no direct linkage was made on the Conference floor, another example of Canadian Conference-General Conference competition was apparent. The Mennonite Brethren-owned Christian Press was preparing to offer two publications in direct competition with the General Conference at a time when the Canadian Conference also constituted 54 per cent of General Conference membership. To avoid such costly competition and duplication, the General Conference approved a resolution calling for the amalgamation of the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House and the Christian Press, and that a way be found for every Mennonite Brethren home in North America to receive the same two official periodicals, one in German, one in English.

No consensus was reached on the purchase of the Christian Press by 1958, and the question of financing an English paper remained. The Publications Committee was empowered to work out a financing plan to be tested with the Committee of Reference and Counsel and then sent to the congregations to prepare for a decision in 1959. Therefore, by 1959 the matter of the English-language periodical had been delayed three years and the Christian Press affair was still not resolved.³⁴ Reporting on behalf of the Christian Press board of directors, C. A. DeFehr tried to clarify the situation. His review of negotiations with the private Mennonite Brethren shareholders concluded with a revealing statement, "Should the Canadian Conference decide to purchase the rest of the shares of The Christian Press, the prob-

lem of founding an English family paper would be solved." The delegates agreed to refer the issue to the congregations so the churches could state their position and give their reaction.³⁵

The Publications Committee faced the delegation. P. R. Toews, reported that the committee had drafted a proposal for an English family paper and sent it out to the congregations via the Committee of Reference and Counsel. He felt it necessary to defend the good faith of the committee stating clearly that these proposals had not been drafted merely as a matter of duty, but out of a genuine conviction that "we really do need a family paper. How shall we transmit our heritage to the coming generation if not by the printed page?"³⁶ While the committee had planned to ascertain the reaction of the congregations in discussion on the convention floor, negative informal reaction had already forced the committee to drop their former proposal and begin anew. The problem was twofold. Delegates resisted the cost of the periodical and thus wanted further investigation of possible cooperation with the General Conference on a combined project. The Committee agreed.

By the 1960 convention the congregations had made up their minds. The purchase the Christian Press was approved by 67 per cent of the members voting, representing 63 per cent of the total Canadian Conference membership. This, however, still did not resolve the English periodical issue. The Publications Committee had decided not to move on its assignment to work out a common plan with the General Conference until the Press purchase question was settled. Now the English periodical issue was taken to the General Conference. At the centennial convention of the Mennonite Brethren, H. F. Klassen reported that the Canadian Conference had purchased the Christian Press and assured the General Conference delegates that Canadian Mennonite Brethren were keenly interested in publishing a unified English language conference periodical. The delegates approved a recommendation that the General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel draft a plan for a single General Conference periodical in concert with the General Conference Board of Publications and the Canadian Conference Publications Commit-

tee.³⁷ A year of negotiations were unsuccessful, however, and the motion ultimately presented to the Canadian delegation in 1961 called for the Christian Press and Mennonite Brethren Publishing House to remain separate enterprises, with each national sector publishing its own paper.

The observation that financing the purchase of Christian Press and financing an English periodical were two interconnected complicating factors is supported by a final flurry of recommendations designed to resolve the matter. In the end, the delegates refused to burden the Conference budget with the cost of financing the purchase of Christian Press shares but they did impose a levy of \$1.00 per member to pay for an English-language Conference periodical.³⁸ The cumulative effect of all these motions was that the Conference had finally committed itself to the publication of an English periodical, and the first edition of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* appeared in January 1962 with Rudy Wiebe as editor.³⁹

In his inaugural editorial Wiebe made no direct mention of the language issue but some of his allusions seem clear enough:

Frequently our method of handling problems has not been the biblical one of clear, outspoken teaching, but rather a simple matter of avoidance. Some summer day, it is hoped, will dawn when the problem will no longer exist. In the meantime, we look studiously in the opposite direction. The time has come when some biblical frankness in the right places would be advisable.

...No one, least of all this writer, will delude himself into thinking that a thin thread of ink across a few pieces of paper will solve a problem which it has taken the perverseness of human beings a decade to concoct. But if we as a brotherhood could learn to speak openly about such topics as deserve public airing, we would have solved the major portion of our problems simply in trying to define them.⁴⁰

In contrast to the *Observer*, here was an English-language Mennonite Brethren paper that would invite open dialogue and de-

bate. The response of the Mennonite Brethren constituency indicated that it was more than ready for this new initiative finally to come to fruition. At the 1962 convention H. F. Klassen reported that they had projected an initial *Herald* subscription of 5,000 but when the subscription list was finally compiled, it numbered some 6,800.

A year after the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* was launched the Committee of Reference and Counsel dissolved the German Language Committee, an action taken upon the Language Committee's own recommendation.⁴¹ During the years of debate about translating the hymnal, buying the Christian Press and starting an English periodical, the committee had continued to report annually and a survey of these reports reveals an increasing sense of futility. Throughout this period the tone and content of the pro-German argument remained much the same except that the rationale became more and more pragmatic and lost some of its triumphalist rhetoric. The tendency to equate faithfulness to the mother tongue with religious integrity remained but was more carefully nuanced.

The close association of language and religion encountered in the rhetoric of 1951-52 had made some pro-German supporters uncomfortable and even defensive. A 1954 contribution to the *Rundschau* well-illustrates the attempt of some to qualify their support for the German language.⁴² The writer, identified only as M. F., lamented the failure of the Inter-Mennonite German *Verein* to clarify the unfortunate "confusion" resulting from the "mingling" and "confusion" of language and religion among Mennonites. The writer's own position on the issue was clear; religion and language were entirely different and unrelated matters and religion was obviously much more important than any language. Nevertheless, M. F. was still determined to retain his or her mother tongue. The German language had historic value and intrinsic worth; it was integral to his or her personal identity. To give up the German language was to become something other than he or she had been heretofore. M. F. professed to having been born German-speaking as an act of divine providence, and thus to switch one's allegiance to another

language was tantamount to disobeying God.

No doubt, such articulate and reasonable voices were welcomed by the German Committee which introduced its 1955 report by predicting that, in a comparatively short time, German would be lost to Mennonite Brethren children if efforts at its retention were slackened. The report argued that a language could either bring people together or separate them. Alluding to the tower of Babel, D. K. Dürksen observed that Mennonites experienced global separation and alienation because they spoke many national languages. If the Mennonites could retain German, they would have a means of under girding their unity.⁴³ The following year Dürksen admitted that the committee had not taken any direct steps toward the promotion of German, but had chosen to work through the inter-Mennonite *Verein*. It was also revealed that of 1,305 former *Verein* members, only 310 had renewed their membership subscription. What little influence the *Verein* had exercised nationally was already spent. In 1957 the committee made its feeling of futility explicit. There was little it could really do except provide moral support for the effort to retain the language. The retention of the language was substantially dependent on the attitude of the Conferences. The increasingly pragmatic emphasis was revealed in 1958 when Chairman Dürksen argued that if congregations retained their German it would be easier for Mennonite Brethren students to do well in their high school and university German studies, giving them access to the world of German religious and intellectual literature. Although German was not a religion for Mennonite Brethren, it was a wonderful medium through which to conduct mission.

This tone of moderation born of futility did not last, however, and the committee did not die gracefully. In 1959 the Committee charged that children who refused to learn German were guilty of willfully sinning against the fifth commandment and causing separation, prejudice, self-conceit and bitterness on both sides of the language dispute. In many congregations, the committee claimed, people were very considerate of anyone in a service who knew only English, while twenty elderly in a service

who did not know English did not receive similar consideration. In this way, the young offended the elderly and would surely reap serious consequences.⁴⁴

C. C. Peters of British Columbia joined the committee in 1961 as a fresh advocate for the cause. He delivered what became the last impassioned and full-length defense of the German language to be recorded in the minutes.⁴⁵ This address illustrates all the important dimensions of the English-German tension as experienced by the pro-German faction. All the elements evident during the previous two decades of language strife were displayed: emotional and religious manipulation, evocation of guilt, authentic spiritual care and apprehension and a sense of profound alienation and loss. These were the fruits of the centrifugal forces at work in family and community because of language. The speech also demonstrated the growing sense of futility being felt by the Committee for the German Language because it did not call for concrete response from the delegation.

The spirit suffusing this closing argument on the Conference floor is best illustrated by an anecdote Peters related. As an ordained minister, Peters had been visiting a home. In the living room, he had met with the grandmother, father, mother and a small boy who was present at the request of his parents. He knew, however, that there were grown children in the family who were also church members, and he asked why they were not present. The father's evasive answer prompted Peters to ask if they were at home. Upon the mother's affirmative reply, Peters went to the younger members in the other room and invited them to the family worship time, but they declined. As Peters became more persistent one young person said, "We cannot understand German." Finally, Peters left the young people where they were and returned to the living room. The grandmother, who did not know English, asked if the young people were coming. "No," replied Peters, "they say they can't understand German." The grandmother became silent, Peters told the delegates. Tears filled her eyes. She had understood. Inwardly broken, she had stood and said with a sob, "Then I will go!" whereupon she removed herself to her room and cried bitterly. Peters said he had

become wounded in his spirit. He had asked himself, "Who would answer for the tears of this loving grandmother who so wanted to take part in family worship in the circle of her loved-ones? Who would answer for such estrangement already evident in the family and soon to enter the congregation?"

Peters concluded by returning to the text he had used in his opening, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."⁴⁶ He declared that the mind of Christ concerning the question of congregational and church unity had been clearly evident when Christ, standing before his Father, prayed, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." In these petitions of Jesus, Peters pointed out, all were included: old and young, German-speaking and English-speaking. The committee had done its work with a view to the unity of the church for which the Saviour pleaded.

It must be remembered that this very long and emotion-laden report came at the end of a convention that had finally resolved to begin publication of the *Herald*. The central theme of the speech had been the preservation of unity in the home and congregation through accommodation to and retention of German. Many would have agreed with the Peters' deep concern for the unity of the church, but would have argued strongly that this unity was being threatened precisely by the intransigent attitude so evident in the report. This report must have confirmed the fear of some that a schism might erupt.

The pathos evident in this report must, however, also be taken seriously. Many congregations were in the middle of their own local language transitions at this time, and the emotions and pain evident in this report could have been multiplied many times across the Conference. Even if leaders were able to avoid a schism at the Conference level on the language issue, this did not ensure that local congregations would be spared the pain of such splits. Nevertheless, no impassioned appeal of the committee could turn the tide. The next year, in 1962, both English and German were deemed appropriate for the discussion of Conference business at the convention.⁴⁷ *Zweisprachigkeit* had fi-

nally been granted to Conference delegates.

When English became the official language of Canadian Mennonite Brethren in 1965 a significant threshold was crossed. The move did not so much signal change as acknowledge that it had already occurred. By then English had substantially replaced German in the everyday-life of Mennonite Brethren children, youth and adults up to middle age. Mennonite Brethren homes, schools and publications had become predominantly English speaking. In the local congregation, youth programs and Sunday schools were either already completely English, or on the verge of becoming so. In most of the established and traditional congregations, the Sunday morning worship service was the last institution to fall before the onslaught of accommodation, but it was this last transition that was also the most difficult. In terms of the everyday religious experience of ordinary Mennonite Brethren, the transition from German to English at the Conference level was distant and even irrelevant, but the analysis of these macro-developments provides valuable insight into the battle some Mennonite Brethren fought to keep English out of their denomination and how they failed. In the meantime, however, much was happening at the congregational level where the drama of language transition was actually being played out. The next step must be to approach the issue of German and English and Mennonite Brethren religious life in the context of the local congregation.

Winkler Case Study: To the Brink of Schism

B. B. Janz had predicted the possibility of Mennonite Brethren schism with its "rupture and pain, misunderstanding and contempt"¹ unless the language question could be managed adequately. He could not have been more accurate in his prophecy. The story of the Winkler Mennonite Brethren congregation's struggle with language transition shows how the power of the German-English tension could generate sufficient conflict to threaten a congregation with the trauma of profound and lasting schism. A growing dissonance between the sacred German language of worship and the work-a-day language of English forced the congregation to make a choice. In the process the congregation had to calculate the price of unity. A majority in the congregation perceived the price of unity to be the abandonment of German bilingual Sunday morning worship in favour of unilingual English-language worship. On the other hand, a minority in the congregation had fastened on the conviction that genuine worship and religious nurture must be experienced in one's everyday language, and unless they were able to achieve this within the life of the Winkler congregation, they were determined to form a new fellowship where their ideal could be realized. In the end, the two groups compromised and retained at least the semblance of outer structural unity.

The story of language transition in the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church highlights the role of congregational leaders in controlling the pace of change and shaping its impact upon the membership. The Winkler story also demonstrates how central language transition is to understanding the history of Mennonite Brethren as a whole between 1940 and 1970. Asking the question of language in the context of these years tends to highlight many other dynamics of change and conflict. In the Winkler instance for example, language transition was closely tied to changes in pastoral leadership, the controversy over allowing

women to vote in congregational affairs, and the need for expanded facilities.²

The Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church was the first Mennonite Brethren congregation founded in Canada. Its beginnings are rooted in the 1883 decision of the Mennonite Brethren General Conference to send Heinrich Voth of Minnesota and David Dyck of Kansas to Manitoba on a missionary expedition among the Mennonites there. Five years later a Canadian Mennonite Brethren congregation was founded at Burwalde, Manitoba with a nucleus of sixteen members. In 1897 the congregation decided to move to a more central location in near-by Winkler and by 1921 it had 318 members. By 1930 the membership rose to 390, an increase of 23 per cent. This influx largely resulted from the addition of some thirty-seven families who emigrated to Canada from Russia between 1923 and 1930 augmenting the original *Kanadier* convert membership by more than 20 per cent with first-generation German speakers. After 1930 the size of the congregation stabilized, fluctuating between 300 and 400 members. Thus, Winkler represents a large congregation of *Kanadier* convert origin but with a significant *Russländer* component.

Initial Accommodation and Accelerating Change

Language was not controversial within the Winkler congregation before 1957, but concern about the issue was slowly increasing, and a limited amount of accommodation was taking place. What controversy there was came about as the congregation incorporated a professional paid pastorate into its traditional mode of leadership and congregational polity.³ Prior to 1950 the leading minister of Winkler was H. S. Voth, a former itinerant evangelist who came to Winkler to farm in 1931. Voth served as leader for nineteen years, but in the seventeen years following him, Winkler had three different leaders, and the successive developments of language transformation appear correlated to changes in the primary leadership of the congregation. G. D.

Pries, who succeeded Voth, was remunerated part-time but was also on the faculty of the Winkler Bible School and had been a member of the congregation before his election as leader. J. H. Quiring, who was called from outside the congregation, should be regarded as Winkler's first professional pastor and the congregation experienced unprecedented change on many fronts, including language, during his tenure. By 1957, however, his proactive leadership style had outstripped the congregation's capacity for change. Resistance set in and the strongest sign of this was reaction against further accommodation of the English language.

The Pries years saw virtually no change in the language of the congregation except for the gradual inclusion of more English in the youth program. The most important feature linguistically was the growing disjunction between the sacred German language and the daily life of younger people. The 1951 annual reports to the membership show that the normal working language of younger church members was English, but they remained sufficiently bilingual to report to the congregation in the obligatory German language. The children of the congregation also faced a disjunction of language. Worship was thoroughly German, while Sunday school and most of their lives outside the church, was English. Winkler, with its longer *Kanadier* convert history, had already introduced English into its Sunday school by 1940, and by 1949 English was the language of instruction in the classes serving the children and youth between ages six and seventeen. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in November 1951, an unnamed council member asking that something be done to help children benefit more from the German worship services. No action is recorded, but the incident points to a seed of dissatisfaction that would bear bitter fruit half a generation later.

The youth of the congregation were aware of the needs of children and took steps to address these needs. Before 1950 *Jugendverein* services were in German but included an English story for the children. In 1954 the young people advised council of their intention to begin conducting English meetings on some Sunday evenings.⁴ Council stipulated such English gatherings

should not displace the regular Sunday evening German *Jugendverein* meetings. It is not clear whether these new meetings were intended for the general membership or for youth only, or how many actually materialized. It is apparent, however, that for younger members and children German was becoming a special language reserved for religion but increasingly irrelevant to daily life.

In 1954 Pries became dissatisfied with his stipend of \$100 per month, and the membership doubled it. At the end of the year the question of engaging a salaried leader precipitated a heated controversy lasting four months until February 1955 when J. H. Quiring was appointed as the first paid pastor. The process, a confusing welter of motion, counter-motion and protest, indicates the difficulty the membership had in breaking with the almost century-long Mennonite Brethren tradition of unpaid leadership. Once made, however, the decision did open the congregation to a modest spirit of innovation and invested it with a high level of commitment to the success of Pastor Quiring, its new leader. This enabled Quiring to capitalize on his first year of good will and establish a significant momentum for change.

J. H. Quiring was affirmed as a candidate for pastoral leader in February 1955. At the time he was registrar and professor of religious philosophy at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College. By June the membership had approved him as its salaried leader. Quiring's first year saw more change and innovation than the entire five years of Pries' tenure. Some pivotal initiatives originated with Quiring himself but his leadership also encouraged others in the congregation to become more proactive. A significant portion of this activity was language-related and thus Quiring was the catalyst for the first important period of English accommodation after 1940. An important dynamic of Quiring's leadership was his interest in the larger Winkler community. His outreach initiatives resulted in the congregation displaying an English face to the public while maintaining an internal German reality.

Quiring's first year was a remarkable achievement of innovation and change. At his initiative, but with the support of

the council and the congregation, English Sunday evening services were instituted while the *Jugendverein* services were halved. English was introduced into two important congregational institutions, the annual Bible conference and evangelistic services. The council was opened up to new members and a creative new form of outreach to the community was accepted by broadcasting hymns to the community from loudspeakers mounted on the church steeple. While the amount of innovation in Quiring's inaugural period is important, it is equally significant that ordinary, and especially older, church members would have noticed almost no disruption in their accustomed routine of worship and church attendance. For example, people seeking to participate in English services now could attend Sunday evening services. Those not wanting English services would not have been accustomed to regular Sunday evening attendance in any case. The most important achievement of this period, however, was not the substance of the changes introduced, but the exposure of the congregation to the very idea of change itself.

Gathering Resistance

During the second half of his first term, Quiring launched two new initiatives in Christian education. One led to the first language-related breakdown of consensus on the council; the other created the most militant source of pressure for language accommodation. While the congregation and its leaders would not have been aware of it, the year 1957 marked the beginning of steadily growing resistance to language accommodation. Over the next five years this resistance grew and diversified until the congregation became polarized on multiple issues. A decade later, in 1967, the congregation was of the brink of schism. Gender and language were primary factors in this rising alienation.

A single bulletin recovered from May 7, 1957, provides a benchmark in trying to understand the degree of language accommodation during the Quiring years. To the larger Winkler

community, the bulletin presented an invitational English public face but a linguistically separate inner reality. On the frontispiece were a photograph of the church, the heading "Mennonite Brethren Church, Winkler, Manitoba" and Psalm 84:1 and Acts 1:8 in English. At the very bottom appeared a German text, "*Wir aber predigen den gekreuzigten Christus.*" 1 Kor. 1. 23."⁵ Inside, the order of Sunday morning worship, the Sunday evening *Jugendverein* service, and virtually all the announcements were in German. The morning service order included an English children's feature for the youngest worshippers of the congregation. The Wednesday evening "Youth Hour" was announced in English. Thus, the document presented an unequal mixture of language in the congregation. The public face was English and seemed designed to be invitational to English speakers. Internally, everything except for specific accommodations to children and youth was designed to serve the dominant and controlling German mainstream of the congregation. The process of language transition was not yet very far advanced.

Quiring, however, continued to press for change. In the spring and summer of 1957 he successfully introduced and gained approval for an English-language family mid-week Christian education program. In the process Quiring experienced the first language related impasse. A faction on the council sought to replace Quiring's proposal for an English program for the children and youth with a German school, or failing this, at least to ensure that the new program would be in German. Failing to resolve the issue, the council forwarded Quiring's plan to the congregation but without recommending either its acceptance or rejection. When Quiring introduced the matter to the membership several days later, he chose not to mention the language controversy, but merely repeated the presentation he had made to the council. Several members from the congregation spoke in favour of the proposal—and it was endorsed by a vote. This decision put into place a comprehensive, deliberately English program of religious nurture. Consequently, new English services were added, not substituted for German services. Older members continued to have their German Bible study and prayer

meetings on Wednesday and their German worship service on Sunday morning but the youth of the congregation would find Sunday morning worship increasingly irrelevant.

In October of 1957 Quiring broached the possibility of drafting a church constitution. At least one council member, Sunday school superintendent Frank Brown, understood what was happening and followed up Quiring's notion with a proposal for a Christian Education Committee to coordinate the Sunday school and the new Wednesday evening program. At the subsequent annual meetings this new committee was instituted without any difficulty, but no new overall constitutional framework was adopted. The same annual meetings affirmed Quiring for a new three-year term, demonstrating that his position remained secure. Nevertheless, the breakdown of council consensus on the issue of which language would be used in the new mid-week program was an early warning sign that by 1961 language would be the most potent force for disunity and pain in the congregation.

The first sign of this mounting tension surfaced as a direct attack on one of Quiring's special projects. This occurred at the same November 1957 annual meetings that affirmed Quiring for his second term. Earlier in 1957 Quiring had secured congregational funds to start an English radio broadcast over station CFAM in Altona, Manitoba. The broadcast was named the "Christ for Victory Hour" with Quiring as speaker and a special radio choir providing the music. Now, nine months later, some members wanted the broadcast to become bilingual, and while no action was taken, this marked the eventual end of the project. Nineteen months later, in June 1959 the membership split exactly in half on a vote concerning the program's continuation and within a year the project was dead.

A further sign of growing opposition to Quiring's leadership was the council's refusal to agree to a restructuring in connection with Quiring's hoped-for constitution. It would appear that Quiring was trying to break the practice of automatically placing all deacons and ministers on the council regardless of age, temperament or suitability to the task of council leadership,

but the senior members of the council were not prepared to see their power tampered with. At its November 1958 meeting the council challenged any notion of changing its structure and no such proposal was forwarded to the membership. The first year of Quiring's second term, beginning in November 1956, stood in marked contrast to his inaugural twelve months in 1955-56.

By December 1960, the end of Quiring's second term, a growing lack of linguistic congruence was evident. In April 1959 an unnamed council member asked whether it was time to replace the English Sunday morning children's feature with a full-fledged English sermon. The council split on the issue and no conclusion was reached. The following month the members rejected the proposal from the Canadian Committee of Reference and Council to finance the combined *Mennonite Observer* and *Jugendblatt* with a levy of \$1.00 per member and in this way to supply the English family paper free of charge to every household. The pro-German faction explicitly protested that an every-member levy for an all-English paper was unjust. The annual meetings voted Quiring three more years but this time only by 73 per cent of the voting members present.

This recorded vote also affords another observation. The size of the 1960 membership was 351 while the number of members present at the December 6 session of the annual meetings was fifty-five. Thus, only 14 per cent of the membership acted on a matter as important as the confidence vote for the pastor. At the April meeting the council resolved to start recording attendance at communion services and membership meetings. At the same meeting, the issue of women and the vote was raised, this time urgently. Earlier, in August of 1959, a council member had asked his colleagues what role women could play in membership meetings. Now the council agreed to submit the question to study and prayer and to call a special meeting regarding this question in a month's time. Such developments point to an increasing level of alienation and disenfranchisement in the congregation. With a high rate of absenteeism from membership meetings, and with the denial of female involvement in the process of congregational discernment, a min-

ority of members was making the decisions in the congregation.

In August, after a delay of two years, a special meeting of council was announced to discuss whether women would be allowed to vote and to take part in discussion at membership meetings, but when the September meeting convened at least a quarter of the council members was absent.⁶ A resolution to extend the vote to women was rejected out of hand, with abstentions being treated as negative votes to give them the effective force of a veto.⁷ Four months later, in January 1962, Quiring announced his resignation with specific assurances that his decision was not a reaction to any feeling of dissatisfaction on his part. In the closing months of his ministry, the women's question became a most contentious issue, twice splitting the council so badly it did not dare to bring the matter before the members. In effect, the women's issue seriously impaired the capacity of the council to exert constructive and progressive leadership, a development directly contributing to the coming language crisis.

To some, Quiring's decision appeared as a form of divine judgment as assistant leader H. P. Harder appealed to the membership to cleanse itself and seek God's help. A pastoral search committee of three was appointed and plans for a nomination ballot were laid. Quiring's resignation did not extricate him from the women's issue, however. Selecting and calling a new leader became very controversial and some members wanted women to be able to vote. Quiring, who had remained in the chair, was not willing to add such a contentious issue to an already difficult situation, and could only promise that the women's issue would again be brought to the council and the membership.

The leadership selection process revealed that the polarization on the council had also infected the membership and that language was beginning to become a factor in this tension. As the council began its task the qualifications of a prospective pastor were discussed. There was no mention of age, academic credentials or previous experience, but specific concern that he be strong in both German and English, and able to understand both the young and the old. On March 19, with Quiring in the

chair, the membership prepared to nominate a new leader. After agreeing that a two-thirds majority affirm the new leader, the meeting learned that Hermann Lenzmann, a member of the congregation and a minister, had emerged as a candidate from the silent ballot conducted among the members. Quiring nevertheless invited further nominations, only to face a motion to vote on the Lenzmann name immediately. Quiring ruled this out of order and I. R. Dyck and Donald Kroeker placed P. R. Toews in nomination. Toews at this time was the leader of the Frasersview Mennonite Brethren Church in Vancouver. When the results of the ballot were announced, Lenzmann had twenty-nine votes and Toews had twenty-eight. The impasse was broken when Quiring suggested polling absent members and the membership agreed. When the results were announced a week later, Lenzmann had forty-seven votes; Toews had forty-two. The minute states that "after a short silence" the language question was raised as a basis upon which to decide between the two nominees, but two motions demanding a single and deciding ballot immediately forestalled this. The results of the ensuing vote garnered Lenzmann 82 per cent. It is noteworthy that when the process failed to afford the congregation a decisive outcome, the language issue was invoked as a means to break the deadlock. The Lenzmann-Toews split probably reflected the division between the more progressive and conservative elements of the congregation.

A week after the congregation had affirmed Hermann Lenzmann as leader Quiring kept his promise and raised the issue of the women's vote with the council. The minute stipulates clearly that men from the congregation wanted the council to examine the question and bring a recommendation to the membership. Differing arguments were presented⁸ and finally a secret ballot was cast. When asked, "Are you personally in favour of allowing women to vote?" six voted no, five voted yes and one abstained. The issue was tabled, but Pastor-elect Lenzmann would face the same scenario before year's end.

On April 9 the council met again, scarcely a week after the previous gathering. At this point the Constitution Committee presented a proposed constitution. The council received the draft

and commended it for presentation to the membership with one concrete suggestion; the draft should be translated into German before the membership meeting. Obviously, the normal and preferred working language of the Constitution Committee was English. A month later, scant weeks before Quiring's resignation was to take effect, the constitutional question was before the membership and the committee confessed that while the proposed constitution had been translated into German, it was so poorly done the English version would govern the discussion. Quiring read and translated the proposed constitution article by article and a series of amendments was proposed. Again, the structure of the council was challenged. When asked whether deacons would automatically be on council, the careful reply of the committee was that, yes, deacons would serve on council, but only as they were annually voted to the council by the membership on an individual basis. The motion to endorse this policy passed twenty-four votes to ten. Pastor-elect Lenzmann then noted that no provision had been made for the ministers to be on council and said that this was an oversight. The question was referred to the committee.

Several important observations must be made. First, Quiring's tenure as pastor ended much as it had begun, with the congregation actively engaged with proposed reforms and some members eager to use the disequilibrium created by a leadership transition to press for resolution of outstanding tensions. The matter of language and the draft constitution is very instructive. The committee had been unable to prepare an adequate German draft of the constitution. The members of the committee were congregational leaders of secondary rank, but leaders nonetheless. For these men, German was becoming a passive language and thus by 1962 the disjunction between sacred language and the language of ordinary life was not restricted to the youth but was a fact of everyday experience in the mainstream of the congregation. These men were not able to work creatively in the language the congregation was still insisting on as the primary medium of worship and corporate instruction. Language was not only serving as an external boundary marker for the congrega-

tion, but now also existed as a barrier within the congregation.

Developments between 1950 and 1962 show that Winkler had made limited progress in language transition but that the steps taken were significant. Young people and children had access to English-language spiritual nurture in Sunday school and weekday programs while older adults retained their largely German worship services. This kind of selective accommodation, however, was institutionalizing the personal language dissonance experienced by younger individuals in the very routine and program of the church. The Mennonite Brethren insistence that religion and daily life be fundamentally integrated meant that for some, this dissonance would become intolerable.

The congregation had also received its first taste of proactive and progressive leadership on the language issue during this period. Quiring's initiatives had advanced the selective accommodation already mentioned, but they had also put the conservative majority of the congregation on its guard. Language transition would become progressively more difficult. Finally, however, Quiring's interest in Christian education and community outreach had nurtured a group within the congregation that placed itself on the leading edge of the language question. This means that Lenzmann inherited all the stresses of the later 1967 crisis from the Quiring tenure; the attempt to control these tensions in a dual language congregation proved unsuccessful.

Denial, Suppression and Manipulation

Hermann Lenzmann's appointment as pastor was a conservative reaction against J. H. Quiring's attempt to lead the congregation along a path to gradual reform and eventual language transition. Lenzmann appears to have supported the idea of a bilingual congregation and during his tenure the conservative faction of both the council and membership reacted strongly against any accommodation on the principal tensions facing them. When his resignation came in 1967 it was without warning at the end of a council meeting that had finally agreed to

propose the elimination of German from Sunday morning worship. As the congregation tottered on the brink of bitter division in the months after Lenzmann's resignation, it paid a high price for the five preceding years of denial and manipulation. In the process, language emerged as the most fundamental and schismatic problem confronting the congregation. Finally, while structural unity was maintained, the spirit of the congregation was so deeply divided that the outer form of integrity merely served to mask the rupture within.

The more conservative tone of Lenzmann's administration was set at one of the first council meetings he chaired. Some on the council, perhaps including Lenzmann himself, were trying to exploit the change in administration to re-introduce German into the Sunday evening service. One suggestion was to eliminate English from the service altogether. No consensus was reached, indicating that from the very beginning of his term, the council was having difficulty reaching an internal agreement on the language issue.

It is difficult to determine precisely when the congregation adopted bilingual worship, but the seventy-fifth anniversary history of 1963 states, "With few exceptions, until 1955 the morning services of the Winkler M. B. Church were conducted in the German language. Today, the service is divided equally between English and German."⁹ This claim presents serious ambiguity not only about the timing but also about the definition of the bilingualism implied. It is possible to narrow the period in question. There is evidence that English preaching was not adopted before 1959 and perhaps not before 1961. Thus, it remains unclear whether this crucial change occurred during the latter Quiring years or early in Lenzmann's term.

More ambiguous is the nature of this development. It is difficult to reconcile the claim about an equal division between English and German with a 1964 request that "English songs also be sung on Sunday mornings because several believe that this will help many not to feel so strange or alien."¹⁰ It seems very unlikely that English preaching would have been accepted before English congregational singing. The sermon was the

heart of Mennonite Brethren worship with extemporaneous prayer and music playing strong secondary roles. This meant that usually any threat to the preeminence of German preaching was resisted longer than accommodation in other worship elements. If English singing was still in questions in 1964, the true nature of the 1963 bilingualism must be questioned.

It is clear, however, that bilingualism was not adopted by means of formal congregational processes. Until 1964 the language issue did not arouse very much overt controversy in the congregation at large. In 1965 the pro-German element described the status quo as remaining a "dual-language congregation."¹¹ By early 1967 everyone agreed that the choice was between bilingual and unilingual English Sunday morning worship. Even if the bilingual nature of Sunday morning worship may be suspect, a survey of language developments until 1965 supports the claim that in general, Winkler was becoming a "dual-language congregation." For example, Wednesday evening Bible studies were conducted in both languages simultaneously. Evangelism and outreach efforts included Low German, High German and English, and the youth themselves were now using German to reach out to their own seniors on special occasions.

If the early Lenzmann years point to a congregation trying to create language balance, the same spirit of tolerance did not extend to the gender issue. When the final draft of the constitution was presented to the 1962 annual meeting, the unresolved question of giving the vote to female members was raised again, and while it remained unsolved, the resulting conflict almost scuttled acceptance of the constitution. In June 1963 the women's vote issue was raised again, marking the fifth time it had either been on the council agenda or raised by the membership. The new council was no more in agreement than the old,¹² and it voted fourteen to three to refer the question, unresolved, to the membership, but the issue remained buried until August of 1966.

Controversy was avoided during 1963 and the summer of 1964 as Winkler Mennonite Brethren celebrated their seventy-fifth anniversary. The October 1964 council meeting, however,

became a watershed event when pro-English leaders served notice on two issues. They expected, in time, to receive their share of pastoral time and attention, and there was, they believed, a serious language problem in the congregation. First, they challenged the premier status of German in the congregation by requesting that Lenzmann lead the English Wednesday evening Bible study and prayer meeting. The council decided that Lenzmann would complete his current Wednesday evening studies with the older German group that season and then be available to work with the English group the following year.

The second request had critical consequences for language transition. Don Kroeker, chairman of the Christian Education Committee and leader of the English Wednesday evening Bible study, asked permission for the Christian Education Committee to draft a proposal concerning the "language problem in the congregation." After long discussion permission to draft a proposal was granted by a narrow margin, but again the council was seriously split.¹³ The pro-English concerns of the Christian Education Committee can be inferred from the council's response to a report from the Music Committee. Some on the council complained that many in the congregation were not feeling included during Sunday morning worship, but incorporating English songs into the Sunday morning congregational singing would help alleviate this, they thought.

At the 1964 annual meeting the Christian Education Committee announced that it was studying the extent of the language problem in the church and what could be done to improve the situation. The committee, however, had already prejudged the outcome of the projected research and had prepared a format for a different order of worship. The pro-German members of the congregation had suspected the true motivation of the Education Committee from the very beginning and began to block the project, so that in April the membership decided not to discuss the prepared questionnaire because, they said, Holy Week was upon them. In June a long and vigorous debate ensued. Its tone is indicated by an eventual motion by Aron Enns and A. C. Klassen "that we forget the questionnaire and remain a dual-lan-

guage congregation in the mode we have had until the present.”¹⁴ This was challenged as Don Kroeker moved an amendment that “we delete the second part of the motion and vote on the first part only.” Kroeker obviously wanted to forestall a vote that could be construed as a decision in principle to remain with the status quo. The ballot vote on the amendment failed,¹⁵ and when the ballots on the original motion were counted, it passed by 65 per cent.¹⁶

This exchange indicates that some members were resistant to any suggestion of language change. It also reveals the kind of political maneuvering that would characterize the language transition process. Enns and Klassen who formalized the move to stall the Christian Education Committee were neither ministers, nor deacons, nor members at large of the council; thus the resistance facing the Christian Education Committee came from rank and file membership. Kroeker expected the Enns-Klassen motion to succeed, and his amendment was an attempt to keep a principle decision on the issue of bilingualism from being recorded. The number of votes for the Kroeker amendment and against the Enns-Klassen motion match, indicating that 30 per cent of the members present wanted to proceed with the questionnaire. The members abstaining supported the status quo but elected not to declare themselves, even in a secret ballot. The use of a secret ballot for both the main motion and the amendment shows that the level of trust and confidence had seriously eroded in this “brotherhood.”

Pro-German members had successfully blocked an attempt to survey the congregation on the language issue and had won a decision in favour of bilingualism. The endorsement of bilingualism, won by explicitly defeating the Kroeker amendment, was understood by the conservative majority as the last word on the subject of further language transition. For the next four years this decision would be remembered, and the stubborn insistence of the Christian Education Committee to re-open the question would be interpreted as rebellion against the express will of the congregation.

The determination of the Christian Education Committee

was soon evident. In November 1965 Don Kroeker addressed the annual meetings in English, reminding the membership that the special project begun earlier to determine the language requirements of the church had been halted in the summer. A specific recommendation followed: "With some hesitation but with real concern we recommend that the church consider its attitude toward the investigation of our language requirements."¹⁷ Neither the council nor the membership, however, were prepared to confront the extremely sensitive issue of language again on such short notice and the recommendation was tabled until the next regularly scheduled membership meeting.

Another relevant event also occurred at these annual meetings. The Christian Education Committee successfully persuaded the church to investigate the feasibility of constructing an education building. This concern for facilities had been referred to the Christian Education Committee and trustees at the 1963 annual meetings for immediate action. In the interval, however, the Christian Education Committee had virtually ignored the matter while it spent its time on the language issue.

True to its promise, the council placed the language questionnaire on the agenda of the February 1966 membership meeting—second last on the agenda; the last place had been reserved for the women's vote. After vigorous debate, and a series of motions, counter motions, and secret ballots a slim majority of the membership had agreed to a survey of the membership on the language issue and to giving the vote to all members eighteen years of age and older.¹⁸ The conservative majority of those attending membership meetings had finally allowed the language and gender issues to advance but, in the process, the battle became seriously embittered. The vote on the survey was split with only a four-vote margin and the women's issue had only passed because abstentions had virtually balanced the positive votes on the deciding ballot. With the achievement of female suffrage, however, the Christian Education Committee had access to the broadest possible range of opinion in the congregation. Lenzmann and the council had finally been willing to allow matters to come to a decision but they were not proactive on

either side. The political will for change was lodged with the Christian Education Committee who secured their objective by sheer determination. In terms of congregational unity and goodwill, the cost of granting women the vote was extremely high because, in terms of the explicit and careful wording of the deciding motion, the conservatives forced the progressives to vote explicitly against "Scripture" and the traditional teachings of their leaders on gender. It is difficult to imagine a more prejudicial or divisive way to word the proposition. The congregation left this meeting deeply wounded.

The questionnaire results did not become known until six months later when Lenzmann told the August membership meeting that 257 of the 331 members had returned their responses. Eighty-seven per cent said their needs were being met and the overall conclusion of the survey was that 71 per cent of the membership was satisfied with the present arrangement. Two facts had been established: first, the Christian Education Committee had received an answer to its publicly stated question and purpose; second, when ambiguities about the exact statistical configuration of the results were set aside, the reality remained that over half of the membership had declared their satisfaction with the present bilingual arrangement. For the second time in as many years, the congregation had declared that it was content with the present dual-language arrangement, and it had even gone the second mile and granted the Christian Education Committee its questionnaire. Now, the conservative portion of the congregation felt vindicated in its position. No language problem existed in the congregation. Despite this apparent conservatism, the majority was willing to make some concessions. The same meeting that received the questionnaire results decided that in the future the language of the communion services would alternate between English and German.

Three months later at the annual meetings, the agenda was completely in English and only the reports of the older women's missionary society and the statistician were prepared in German. The minutes remained German, but the usual business language of the congregation had become English. Such evi-

dence as the communion service decision and reports at the annual meetings shows that Winkler had indeed become a dual-language congregation, and this puts the objectives of the pro-English members into perspective. They did not merely want the main services of the congregation to include English; they were agitating to become unilingually English.

Up to this point, events in the Winkler congregation show an increasing propensity for the congregation to become less united as it resisted change ever more strongly. In the meantime, the everyday language of most in the congregation had become English, leaving only the most important official documents in German, with the language of worship and preaching bilingual. A minority of the congregation, represented by the Christian Education Committee and led by Don Kroeker, wanted to eliminate German from Sunday morning worship. The conservative majority, however, was well aware of the committee's designs and resisted the survey. They believed that it was a ploy to harness the language discontent the committee believed to exist. The gender dispute turned out to have little direct consequence for the language issue. Giving women a voice did not tip the scales in favour of language transition and resolve the crisis. The long and bitter duration of the dispute, however, contributed significantly to the overall tension in the congregation and the stage was now set for a final series of confrontations.

To the Brink of Schism

After the membership declared the language problem non-existent in August of 1966, a seven month interval of quiet followed. During this time the Christian Education Committee decided that a congregational split on the language question was at least an option, if not an attractive probability. In effect, the committee seems to have concluded that dividing the congregation along the lines of language would solve two problems—the language issue and the need for additional Christian Education

space. Implementing this approach meant that the Christian Education Committee would again insist that a language problem did indeed exist, and when the bilingual majority again tried to bring the committee to heel in May 1967, the English-only group was ready with its plans to start a new congregation. At that point, Winkler faced its final decisive moment on the language issue.

Events leading to this moment of truth began to unfold as the Christian Education Committee addressed its mandate to study the problem of space in January. Clearly, whatever inhibition the committee might have had about splitting the congregation was gone. While four optional solutions to the space problem were developed, the committee paid most attention to the option of dividing the congregation and building another church.¹⁹ On the one hand, the committee acknowledged, building a new facility would be expensive and creating two new congregations out of the existing fellowship would be a strain. Extended families would have to decide whether to remain together in one congregation or divide between the two new congregations, one bilingual and the other English. On the other hand, the committee believed that creating a new congregation would promote the numerical growth of both factions, solve the language problem and "meet the needs of both young and old."²⁰

This was the mindset that two Christian Education Committee representatives carried with them into a meeting with the council in March. Their stated purpose was to work through their prepared alternative solutions to the space issue but when the opinion was expressed that the language issue had to be resolved before the space issue could be settled the customary language debate flared up again. One speaker insisted on remaining with the linguistic status quo, reminding the council that the questionnaire had indicated 87 per cent of the congregation to be content and charging that the dissatisfied minority did not want to submit to the majority.

Other voices were ready, however, to rehearse the range of options: conduct a German worship service during Sunday school and an English service between eleven and twelve

o'clock; make Sunday evening services German and Sunday morning services English; gradually lengthen the Sunday morning English preaching and shorten the German preaching until all was English; and finally, form a new English Mennonite Brethren congregation. By midnight the group had acknowledged the basic dilemma. Most of the congregation wanted to remain bilingual, but a small group, led by Don Kroeker, wanted to "step out" and form an English congregation. They wanted to do this, however, with the blessing of the present congregation. When the meeting adjourned the Christian Education Committee had succeeded in putting the language issue back at the top of the congregational agenda.

When the council convened again two weeks later, this time with four Christian education representatives including Don Kroeker, a series of votes narrowed the range of solutions to one: eliminate German from the Sunday morning service completely. The question of how to implement such a decision revealed that the Christian Education Committee had anticipated just such an outcome and had come with a draft ballot to place before the members. Members would decide whether they were prepared to provide a unilingual English Sunday morning service, and if so, whether this should be done by conducting simultaneous German and English services, by asking the English faction to organize a separate church, or by conducting a short German service during the Sunday school and an English service between 11:00 and 12:00 o'clock. Kroeker was asked to prepare this proposal for distribution to the members at the next membership meeting. As the Christian Education Committee representatives were excused from the meeting, any hope they may have harboured for a speedy resolution was doomed as the congregation was now to suffer yet another crisis. Lenzmann had specifically asked his council colleagues to remain behind, whereupon he summarily announced his resignation. Lenzmann's "surprising and unexpected,"²¹ announcement was acknowledged with regret.

At the next membership meeting the congregation also expressed its regret at Lenzmann's resignation but now a number

of members suggested the language issue should be solved before continuing to discuss the leadership question. As Lenzmann closed the meeting, he counseled the membership to, "pray more, and speak less."²² There is no explicit evidence linking the Lenzmann resignation to the language-Christian education space controversy, but the timing of his action and its sudden nature raises the question of whether there might be a connection. He was two-thirds through his second term, close enough to wait for an orderly transition of responsibility, yet he chose a pivotal council meeting to spring his decision on his colleagues. In any case, less than a year after the language survey results had been published, the Christian Education Committee had again forced the issue back to the surface, this time with the added dynamic of a threatened schism and the stress of a pastoral resignation.

It is possible that the committee was addressing the space problem in good faith, despite its obvious preoccupation with the language issue. It appears that a group had decided that its spiritual needs could not be met in a bilingual congregation. Furthermore, this group was prepared to leave if they were unable to force the Winkler congregation to abandon German in its Sunday morning service. It is highly probable that this group consisted of young families whose children were contributing to the space problem. What the pro-English group wanted to avoid was a scenario where the church would commit itself to an expensive expansion of its facilities but not make any changes in the matter of language. In stark terms, the pro-English group was not prepared to commit itself to the project of expanding the facilities unless its language needs would also be met. It was also unwilling to abandon the Winkler congregation with the debt incurred in building new facilities, as it moved on to form its own new English congregation. Thus, from the vantage point of the pro-English faction, the language question was indeed prior to the space question. Not everyone in the congregation understood this.

The ultimate crisis point was reached during a May 12 membership meeting. In the background lay a petition that had been circulated by some older members demanding that the con-

gregation stay with its decision to remain bilingual. Leading up to the May 12 meeting had been a long and inconclusive April 18 membership meeting to consider the Council's proposal to move to an all-English Sunday morning service, and in the process, older members had hardened in their determination to quash any attempt to abandon bilingualism. Everyone now agreed that a 'final' decision had to be made. Thus, in response to the motion that, "We conduct our [Sunday morning] service as we have until now and remain bilingual—Yes or No," moderator Alfred Kroeker ruled that "we will keep to the outcome whatever it is." The motion carried with 68 per cent of the members who voted. The recording secretary observed in the minutes that "the congregation now still wishes to remain bilingual; the proposal to work towards just one language is set aside and no longer discussed."²³

All hope for such closure was denied, however. The pro-English faction now moved that if a group should organize to build a new congregation because its needs were not being met, the present congregation should wish such a group God's blessing. With no opportunity for discussion, the motion was immediately accepted by show of hands with a large majority, although many abstained. Contrary votes were not solicited. At this point it probably began to dawn on the bilingual majority that the English minority was truly prepared to walk away. Now some observed that the congregation might have moved to the previous vote²⁴ too quickly without having had time to consider all the implications of the decision at hand. The English-only group, however, lost no time in acting on the affirmation they believed they had secured. Three days later, twenty-four specially invited people gathered in the cafeteria of the Winkler Bible School dormitory to discuss their next steps. Don Kroeker was appointed leader and committees were organized. The group planned to become independent as soon as possible.

On May 21 the council reviewed the actions of May 12 in detail. Some were critical of the procedure leading to the blessing of the pro-English group, saying the vote had been taken too quickly with no opportunity given for debate. Had the vote been

more "regular," they said, the motion to bless the schismatic group might not have passed. Then Lenzmann announced what everyone already knew—the English group had organized separately. Now, to forestall a division, several of the older members were willing to see the German preaching time shortened. Agreeing that a split should be avoided, the council discussed how the Sunday morning service might be structured to separate the languages of worship. A variety of timetables juggling Sunday school and two worship services were proposed. An option to conduct German worship during Sunday school was especially opposed because it was said the older group would be isolated as no one except the older members would attend the German service and they would have no fellowship with the rest of the congregation. Furthermore, with the rest of the congregation in Sunday school, the German group would have no choir. At the end of the discussion, the council agreed that a consensus on separate services was possible but they were unable to agree on a specific plan.

The fact that the English faction was indeed ready to separate from the congregation had induced the council to reconsider the feasibility of two unilingual services. In the mind of the council, such an internal division was preferable to outright schism. The English group responded to this overture by agreeing to put its organizational plans on hold. Three days later the council met again and with only one contrary vote agreed to recommend that the membership annul the two decisions of May 12²⁵ and accept a trial Sunday morning schedule placing German worship, Sunday school and English worship in sequence between 9:30 and 12:00 noon.²⁶ The arrangement would be reviewed at the next annual membership meetings.

Lenzmann prepared the June 5 membership meeting to confront the language issue yet again by referring to Acts 15:4²⁷ and declaring that many were dissatisfied with the last two resolutions of the previous membership meeting on May 12. A motion to rescind the last two motions of May 12 was approved by 67 per cent. Lenzmann admitted that the new proposal was not perfect but that it did have the advantage of not forcing any

group to listen to a language they did not love or want. The German service did have shortcomings: it was earlier; it lasted only thirty minutes, and was without the choir; the announcements would need to be abbreviated and the service would be planned especially for the older members. Other members now feared that this German service, over time, would have fewer and fewer participants, but assurances were given that this service would have much support that was not given under duress, but out of love. The vote was delayed for two days so that the congregation might be able to "come to rest." Instead of the regular Bible study and prayer meeting, a special prayer meeting was scheduled before the vote. Two days later the congregation met as planned. A careful series of motions established that any agreement needed a two-thirds majority and that if the proposal failed the bilingual arrangement would stand. The new plan was accepted by 69 per cent. The plan was to be implemented experimentally until the annual meetings also carried and, again, the language issue was set aside.

For the sake of coherence, the twists and turns of the language controversy have been followed to the exclusion of another pressing question. Who would be the next leader of the congregation? Throughout the series of meetings, the membership had also been going through the process of putting forward nominations for leader. Now the Pulpit Committee reported that all the nominees submitted by the membership had been asked in turn, and all had declined. A motion that the Pulpit Committee now use its own discretion in bringing a name to membership was carried. No doubt the congregation and the council were now exhausted. Since October 1964 the language question had been debated seventeen times with eleven of those occasions in the period from March 1967 to June. During these four months, the congregation had also faced the resignation of its pastor and begun to wrestle with the question of his replacement. The stress and pain in the "*Gemeinde*" must have been extreme.

With the language issue settled, the way was now clear to return to the matter of space for Christian education. At the July 7 council meeting, the Christian Education Committee petitioned

for more Sunday school space. At the same time, the Pulpit Committee reported it was unlikely that a new pastor could be found by September, and thus recommended the election of a moderator to distribute the work of leadership among several "brethren." The next month, the council voted to recommend the continuation of the provisional separation of German and English worship services. There was one contrary vote and one abstention. When this recommendation was brought to the annual meeting, by now familiar objections were again raised, but a motion to accept the council's recommendation carried fifty-three to twenty-eight.

On January 8, 1968 the congregation voted with an 87 per cent majority to call John Schmidt, of the Vineland Ontario Mennonite Brethren congregation, as pastor. He had specifically agreed to serve in both German and English. The next council meeting briefly discussed the problem of too many members absenting themselves from communion. The wounds of hurt and alienation were not yet healed. In April the council discussed a request to have the Scripture texts for the sermons given in the alternate languages in the Sunday morning services. As Pastor Schmidt arrived in June it was decided that he should preach at least once each Sunday morning and delegate the remainder of the preaching to other ministers. Schmidt also elected to lead the English Wednesday evening Bible study.

The coming of a new pastor again stimulated fresh energy in the congregation. Council and membership minutes changed to English. A board of elders, separate from the council and comprised of ministers and deacons, was planned, and a recommendation for a new education wing at a maximum cost of \$120,000 was approved for presentation to the membership. The annual meeting, however, sent the building project back for further study, and this brought the congregation's pain into the open. On March 3 a very long discussion of the building plans finally ended with the recognition that the church was not united. Secretary Janzen summarized the tension:

The rift appears to have come when two decisions of the church (which had a great majority) were annulled or re-

scinded to keep a minority. The discussion revealed that there are misgivings and misunderstandings. The language problem seems to have caused a lot of it. ...It was agreed that the church proclaim next Sunday a day of fasting and prayer when the church would seek to solve the problem in love and unity.²⁸

The council asked the moderator and secretary to "search the minutes in order to find the time and the place, where we might have failed and draw up a program and resolution for Sunday afternoon."²⁹

On the following Sunday, moderator John Kuhl reported to the council that the rift in the congregation had indeed been caused by the language problem. In response, Schmidt tabled a resolution of confession, contrition and forgiveness to be presented to the membership. The resolution concluded with a call "to seek and promote peace, brotherly love and unity" in the church. This call was motivated by the desire not to hinder the cause of Christ but rather that "church might be built, souls saved and Christians edified."³⁰ As the council joined the waiting membership, Schmidt was in the chair. In German he commented on Matthew 5:23-4; in English on James 5:16.³¹ Moderator Kuhl recounted the history of the language controversy. This was followed by a crucial analysis:

The minutes show that the majority at first favoured this order, where all members attended one service, German and English. By repeatedly bringing up the language question, even threatening to split the membership and finally annulling the decisions of the church to remain as before, it came to the point, where the majority voted in this new order of the church service, where the German and English constitute two separate services. The English one really is by now the main official service.

The language problem lies at the root of it. During the process of language transition many things happened that disrupted the unity of the church. The church has suffered. The language problem still exists, even

though most services are rendered in the English language.³²

After discussion the special resolution of confession and reconciliation was accepted unanimously. At the next membership meeting the treasurer reported an operating deficit of \$8,500 and the membership defeated a recommendation for a new \$85,000 Christian education facility. In June the council endorsed a recommendation from the Board of Christian Education to plan a special evening to honour the senior members. The need for further overtures of reconciliation had not yet ended.

The year of crisis, 1967, marked sixteen years since the nameless council member had alerted his colleagues that something needed to be done for English-speaking children in the German worship service. A restive twelve-year-old in 1951 would have been twenty-eight in 1967, and his thirty-five year old parent would have become fifty-one. Almost a generation had grown up while the congregation struggled to bridge the gap between old and young, German and English—and in the end, division had been unavoidable. Several critical junctures stand out in retrospect.

Initially, the leadership of J. H. Quiring had apparently set the congregation on a path of evolutionary transition. Had the congregation been able to follow this course through a bilingual phase to restored unilingual worship, division would have been averted. Instead, the congregation began to resist the modernization Quiring was bringing to the congregation and he left the pastorate to become president of Mennonite Brethren Bible College. Then, after Lenzmann's initial goodwill period, four events in four years progressively increased the tension in the congregation, bringing the rupture increasingly closer. First, in October 1964, the pro-English faction mobilized behind the Christian Education Committee and started a long-term campaign either to eliminate German from the Winkler mainstream, or to form a new English congregation. In June 1965 the congregation parried the Christian education initiative and declared itself bilingual. A year later, in August 1966, the congregation repudiated the discontent of the English faction and re-affirmed

its bilingual stance. Finally in May 1967, the English group forced the tension to the tearing point, and the bilingual majority of the congregation capitulated.

Ultimately the choice was reduced to two forms of separation, one within the congregation, another outside it. Both options would have destroyed the integrity of the worshipping community but the compromise chosen retained the public semblance of greater unity. In reality, Winkler became two congregations within a single structure and served as a stark example of the schismatic danger of which B. B. Janz had warned. The conflict had produced an episode of deep shame for these Mennonite Brethren. They were forced to confess that their fixation on language, whether it was English or German, had caused them to repudiate two of their fundamental convictions—the integrity of the *Gemeinde* and the way of peace.

North End-Elmwood Case Study: Resisting the Tide of Change

The North End-Elmwood case affords an opportunity to study language transition in a long-standing and leading Mennonite Brethren congregation located in an urban environment. One might hypothesize that the multi-lingual environment of Winnipeg and the normal assimilating influences of the city would have promoted a ready transition but this is not the case. The language issue never threatened North End-Elmwood with schism, but this was due to the skillful, persistent and long-term pastoral leadership of Isaac W. Redekopp and the patience of the congregation's youth. The German-retaining majority of the congregation fought the encroachment of English at every opportunity. The scarcity of such opportunities reflects an important feature of the congregation. North End-Elmwood included a disproportionate number of powerful Conference leaders and former congregational leaders. In Winkler, where the council was relatively weak, issues tended to be fought out on the membership floor, but at North End-Elmwood a powerful council was balanced by a pro-active and politically astute leader. Only when these leaders finally reached an impasse on language did significant controversy erupt outside the council. This gave the members few opportunities to address the language question and the congregation was conditioned not to challenge its leaders on its own initiative.

North End-Elmwood experienced only two significant confrontations on language, both centred on the Sunday morning worship service. The first centred on the incorporation of English preaching into the Sunday morning worship, a process that forced the congregation to accept a formal bilingualism in 1958. A second, equally painful series of developments, led to the permanent segregation of Elmwood worshippers into English and German congregations in 1966.

The Language Issue Takes Shape

Mennonite Brethren were the first Mennonites to become established in Winnipeg,¹ and the Elmwood Church is the congregation with the most direct line of continuity back to the original Mennonite Brethren presence in the city. The original impetus for the formation of the Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren enclave, however, was the result of the movement of Mennonite Brethren into the city and joining in fellowship with other like-minded but non-Mennonite Christians. Early twentieth-century immigrants to the ethnically diverse North End of Winnipeg included German-speaking Baptists and Lutherans from the Saratov area on the Volga River in Russia. Of these, some Swabians and Franconians who had come under pietist influence wanted to form their own separate fellowship within their denominations but they were denied permission. Despite this, they began meeting in homes in 1907 and were joined by several Mennonite Brethren families who alerted the group to the Winkler Mennonite Brethren as a possible source of assistance. A year later, the Winnipeg group joined the Winkler congregation as an affiliate,² and twelve months later it was constituted as an independent Mennonite Brethren Church. By 1911 the fledgling congregation had purchased a chapel and in 1913 the Northern District Conference accepted the city of Winnipeg as an urban mission field, appointing W. J. Bestvater as leader of the North End congregation and missionary to German-speaking immigrants.

Arriving in the 1920s, the *Russländer* swelled the ranks of the congregation as they "flocked to the church, where everything was in German and where they had freedom of religion."³ In 1927 the *Russländer* Mennonite Brethren living south of the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks began meeting separately. By 1925 at least 280 Mennonite Brethren members resided in Winnipeg and 1930 saw a portion of the growing congregation in a new North End facility.⁴ In reality the Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren Church met in five separate locations: the North End, the South End, North Kildonan, Springstein and Marquette, but still considered themselves a single *Gemeinde*,

meeting together in quarterly sessions. The total 1933 membership of the Winnipeg *Gemeinde* was 430. In 1936 the South End congregation independent, followed by the North Kildonan group in 1938. A year later the Winnipeg City Mission was constituted apart from the *Gemeinde* and transferred to the supervision of the Manitoba Conference.

The dual features of a reinforced German identity resulting from the *Russländer* immigration and the early missionary orientation of the congregation set a persistent pattern for the years to come. The North End congregation was located in a Lutheran and Catholic neighbourhood, largely German in ethnic background, where it had mounted a full program of ministry, mostly, but not entirely in the German language. Undergirding the fundamental German character of the congregation was a German school provided for the youth. A 1932 report explained its origin and importance, saying that Mennonite Brethren children must speak and read German well because worship and Sunday school lessons were in German. Almost from the beginning, the Winnipeg congregation offered German instruction, first by the mission workers on a voluntary basis, and later with professional teachers receiving small honoraria paid out of student fees. The curriculum served about thirty students with instruction in the German language and Bible stories.⁵

Alongside the German school, however, there existed an outreach program in the English language with about half of the forty girls in the group from outside the congregation and representing a variety of denominations. This "Young Girls in Christian Service" group, aged six to fourteen years, sewed, memorized Bible passages and visited the sick.⁶ The juxtaposition of the Young Girls in Christian Service and the German school is an early example of a long-term tension in the North End congregation. Obedient to an explicit theology of evangelical mission, the youth increasingly involved themselves in English language outreach. They were also expected, however, to honour the well-defined language boundary between their congregation and the English-speaking segment of their surrounding community.

The dual emphasis on mission and language was still evident in 1943 as the German school had thirty-four children registered while the Young Girls in Christian Service group reported an attendance of forty. The previous year, it was reported that the youth program included a rich diversity of some ten different activities, not to mention involvement in the city mission's outreach to seven different children's groups. In 1948 this attempt to maintain a linguistically defined congregation and an active community outreach program showed the first sign of overt tension when the council was asked to consider switching the Sunday school to English in the interest of community outreach. Despite the promise to discuss the question thoroughly and prayerfully, it does not reappear in the minutes.

In late 1943 B. B. Fast succeeded Franz Thiessen as leader in the tradition of the unpaid, non-professional but ordained ministry. Five years later, at the annual meeting in January 1949, B. B. Fast resigned and the members voted to begin paying a new leader for the time he devoted to the church. While no such leader was found within the congregation, a prospect surfaced in David K. Dürksen of Yarrow, British Columbia. When the council recommended Dürksen as leader at a monthly salary of \$125, however, the congregation had second thoughts. A lengthy debate on the principle of paid leadership ensued but the members finally voted to call Dürksen.

Thus, in 1950 the North End congregation presented a picture of solid growth and linguistic unity. After considerable debate the congregation's first paid leader had been called the year before in the person of David K. Dürksen of Yarrow, British Columbia. North End's membership included front-ranking Conference leaders, and faculty and students of the newly formed Mennonite Brethren Bible College. With at least one English language children's outreach ministry and ample outlet for the energy of its youth, it was also reporting a thoroughly German Sunday school, with the language of instruction for all classes from the cradle role to the adult class being reported as German. Though the issue of language, Sunday school and outreach had already been broached in 1948, nothing had come of

it. Enrollment in the German school was rising, and youth work was reportedly all in German. Pastor Dürksen was placed in an ideal setting to demonstrate that the mother tongue could indeed be retained as a permanent and self-sustaining feature of Mennonite Brethren faith and identity.

The three and a half years of Pastor Dürksen's leadership spanned a crucial time in the language transition of the North End-Elmwood congregation. When Pastor Dürksen resigned in February 1953 to teach German and religion at the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, the seeds of language tension were germinating. The German school had enrolled a record 82 per cent of potential students in 1952, but Sunday school leaders were warning that language was their most serious problem. The congregation was determined to keep the Sunday school as German as possible, but its senior youth, working with the city mission, responded with a successful community summer vacation Bible school for children and then a year-round English-language outreach ministry. While the German *Jugendverein* lost momentum, the youth secured permission for a monthly Saturday evening service in English. Complaints were rising about the amount of English being used in the congregation but leaders did not know how to curtail further accommodation without stifling youthful creativity and energy. All of this was occurring as the Canadian Conference was establishing the Committee for the Preservation of the German Language, with three of its five members, including Pastor Dürksen himself, from the North End leadership.

The sum of these developments points to tension between the growing English linguistic reality of North End children and youth and the determined expectations of German-retaining leaders and members, so that by 1954 the issue of language transition was taking definite shape in the North End congregation. This is well illustrated by documenting German school and Sunday school developments during the Dürksen years.

If any congregation had the resources and leadership to achieve the pro-German vision of the early 1950s it was North End, and the centrepiece of the effort was the German school. In

1950 the congregation capitalized on Dürksen's professional training by asking him to be the leading teacher of its German school, and in the minds of some, this personal attention by the leading minister only invested the school with the status it deserved. In 1951 the fifty-six students were less enthusiastic and Pastor Dürksen requested special prayer for them, saying that the German school was one of the most difficult departments of the congregation to work in. Understandably, students already tired from a full day at regular school could be difficult. Dürksen did not explicitly connect this complaint with the new after-German-school recreational program, but he did explain that the aims of the two were complementary. Clearly, the German school received much attention and committee chairman A. C. DeFehr commended the members for making the school a regular, legitimate and, he hoped, permanent work of the congregation. The school's five aims show why as they succinctly document the integration of German and religion.⁷ They also indicate that German supporters anticipated no difficulty with their expectation that children become proficient in German and would internalize Mennonite Brethren faith and identity at the same time. The congregation intended to retain its German identity indefinitely.

Challenges were not restricted to the German school, as both Dürksen and Sunday school leader J. Wedel agreed that language was the most serious problem in the Sunday school. The situation, Wedel admitted, was similar to the confusion of languages at Babel. While he believed only a few children did not understand German, they were all thinking in English and naturally preferred English songs and stories. Written assignments in German were even more difficult and Wedel admitted that teachers were beginning to use some English. Despite this admission, a year later, Wedel emphasized that German was the language of instruction,⁸ but he also suggested that if space was available they should start English Sunday school classes for community children who did not speak German. He did not mention the possibility of changing the main congregational Sunday school to English for this purpose. While this suggestion

was not acted upon, it does indicate a growing tension within the congregation. It may well be that Wedel's suggestion was intended to segregate English-speaking community children from the congregation's own children and thus relieve teachers working with the congregation's children of the need to use English. The desire to reach out actively to the English-speaking children of the community clashed with the need to maintain congregational boundaries.

As the congregation worried that the German school and Sunday school were becoming more difficult to control, it moved to assert its authority over the youth movement. The youth work consisted of two branches, the traditional but flagging *Jugendverein* providing monthly Sunday evening services in German, and a thriving *Jugendabend* eager to use more and more English. The *Jugendabend* program served more than 200 young people who also distributed tracts and Christian literature on the street and spoke to individuals about their spiritual welfare, distributed Christmas cheer, conducted street meetings, and ran an English summer Bible school for sixty children. Such vitality was threatening to the larger congregation and in September 1951 it reserved the right to appoint the overall leader of the youth work and the respective leaders of the *Jugendverein* and *Jugendabend*. One reason for the congregation's nervousness over its youth related to language.

Establishing congregational authority over the youth, however, did not curb the trend toward English-language activism. The January 1953 council meeting heard a Youth Committee request to conduct one Saturday evening meeting a month in English. While the council agreed to recommend membership approval of this initiative, the matter of language had been raised and some charged that too much English was being used in the Sunday school and *Jugendverein*. The ensuing discussion was complicated by a debate over how tightly the youth should be controlled by the membership. Some believed that regulations for the youth should not be too strict lest they become discouraged. Others maintained that the will of the membership should be clarified and followed. Consensus eluded the council and the

matter was forwarded the membership without a recommendation. At the membership meeting, however, the monthly English Saturday service appears to have been approved.

At that same January membership meeting Dürksen also made a special point of raising the language issue, outlining six reasons for the retention of the German language taken from his first report to the Canadian Conference as chairman of the Language Committee. The following month, Dürksen's letter of resignation was tendered to the council. Dürksen explained his action saying that he had not anticipated resigning so soon, but the pace of change in the congregation and new expectations being placed on him had led him to accept the opportunity to teach German and religion at the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute. At its next meeting, the council considered criteria to govern the leadership search and agreed that it was necessary for the leader to know both German and English well.

The need for a bilingual leader may have been underlined by growth of English usage among the congregation's youth. A North End group was engaged in tract distribution, children's work and jail visitation. In May 1953 the group was named the Youth Missions Committee of the North End Mennonite Brethren Church. By September the Youth Missions Committee had obtained the council's endorsement of its plans to conduct evangelistic meetings in the neighbouring community of Stonewall. Despite the thoroughly German establishment of the congregation, the language of its pro-active and youthful ministry arm was thoroughly English, determinedly reaching out beyond the ethnic confines of the congregation. In 1953 the congregation also had to report that its internal youth program had also become 60 per cent English.

Incremental Bilingualism

The North End Mennonite Brethren Church assimilated considerable change in 1954. With the move to a new building on the east side of the Red River, the name of the congregation

switched to Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church, reflecting its new setting. Additional adjustment came with the appointment of Isaac W. Redekopp as pastor, and the sum of these alterations set the congregation on its path for the next thirteen years until Redekopp's resignation in 1967. During the first two years of his tenure, Pastor Redekopp laid the foundation for his leadership and the congregation adjusted to its new surroundings. From 1956 to 1958 the congregation struggled with the issue of incorporating English preaching into its Sunday morning worship. The final ratification of the English sermon in December 1958 was, at best, only grudging and partial acknowledgment that Elmwood had become a bilingual congregation.

Several dynamics play into these developments. The aggressive leadership of Redekopp was a driving force for change. Secondly, Elmwood members were determined to slow the pace of language transition as much as possible, and only the needs of their English-speaking children and the dogged insistence of Redekopp and his Christian Education Committee won their reluctant ratification of English preaching. Furthermore, the slow pace of language accommodation, coupled with a history of activist youth involvement, produced a young people's English-speaking sub-congregation, parallel to the older English-resistant mainstream congregation. Finally, the tension between maintaining the integrity of the congregation's German language boundaries and English language outreach continued to strengthen.

As the congregation moved toward the February 7, 1954 dedication of its new building, members discovered that the exchange of facility and location also necessitated the confirmation of recent but doubtful innovations. Thus, the youth workers secured special permission to conduct their monthly Saturday evening English program and a weekly mission Sunday school in the new facilities, but their request to hold the English Saturday evening service in the main auditorium was denied so long as the group was small enough to meet in the basement. The dedication service itself was a marked contrast to the normal linguistic practice. Fifteen minutes of the service were in English and rep-

representatives of the Elmwood community were invited. Thus, while the regular Sunday morning service and bulletin were thoroughly German, the Sunday afternoon dedication included an English sermon by J. H. Quiring and the program was printed in English. For this very special occasion, the leadership was prepared to accommodate English speakers but the move to Elmwood did not carry with it any immediate change in normal language policy.

The completed building project also brought resolution of the leadership question. In February of 1954 the council agreed to call I. W. Redekopp, an instructor at the Bible College and an ordained minister in the North Kildonan congregation, as a candidate for leadership. Redekopp agreed, but asked that if affirmed, he be allowed to continue teaching four hours a week at the college and pursue his graduate studies for six weeks in the summer with pay. When he was asked which responsibilities he considered most important as leader, he cited preaching, leading Bible-studies, pastoral care, overseeing congregational ministries, chairing membership meetings and sitting on all committees. For its part, the Pulpit Committee requested that all the preaching and the Sunday school teaching remain German. While Redekopp clearly expected to be a pro-active leader, the council did not want him to lead in the direction of greater linguistic accommodation, and even considered it necessary to make this explicit.

During the Redekopp pastorate the Elmwood congregation emerged as a leading force in the Canadian Conference. The Bible College, the Christian Press and the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute were all in close proximity to the church. College students and high profile faculty such as J. A. Toews and David Ewert were active in its ranks, as were a number of ranking conference leaders such as C. A. DeFehr, A. H. Unruh and H. F. Klassen. Such factors as well as a steadily growing membership established the stature and influence of the "Elmwood Church." In retrospect, the congregation also attributed this growth to Redekopp himself, citing his pastoral philosophy, "One must appeal to the interests of everyone," as rea-

son for the attractive services and membership growth to over 600 during his tenure.⁹ Redekopp's determination to meet and balance multiple and divergent expectations is amply demonstrated in his handling of the language question. His attempt to manage the dynamics surrounding language is characterized by a deliberate move to place himself at the head of the most proactive and innovative forces in the congregation and pursuing a slow and incremental increase of English usage in areas not requiring council recommendation or membership approval.

The characteristic tension between German identity and English outreach became a feature of Redekopp's first year of ministry. When the time came to Elmwood's usual vacation Bible school, the program was divided in two with a half-day in German for children from the congregation, and the other half-day in English for neighbourhood children.¹⁰ At the same time, the membership agreed with an initiative of the youth to reschedule the monthly English youth service to Sunday evenings on a trial basis. Under Redekopp's leadership, this monthly English youth service rapidly evolved in the winter of 1954-55 into a congregational outreach service complete with an English order of service in the bulletin. This transformation of the trial monthly Sunday evening English youth service into a regular English service on the congregational timetable was implemented by Redekopp without recourse to the council or membership for approval. The tension was obvious. On the one hand the council and congregation had structured the vacation Bible school to draw a clear line between church and community. On the other, the new pastor was proactively reaching out to the community at large.

Redekopp took immediate steps to establish a direct connection to the more progressive sectors of the congregation. He successfully persuaded council to grant trial approval for the formation of a Christian Education Committee that, in turn, placed the Sunday school and the youth work under Redekopp's personal control. Its first action was to plan the amalgamation of the *Jugendverein* and *Jugendabend* Committees, place the entire work under a single leader, and in the interim ask Redekopp to

direct the youth work personally. This action was ratified by council but neither the formation of the Christian Education Committee nor its decision to centralize the oversight of the Sunday school and youth work in Redekopp's hands were taken to the membership for discussion or decision.

Elmwood was slowly assimilating incremental amounts of English programming and exposure in late 1955. For example, Redekopp began to encourage non-Mennonite English-speaking groups to use the Elmwood facilities. On three occasions in the winter of 1955-56 he made proposals to council that organizations such as Youth for Christ and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship be allowed to conduct services in the church. Opposition lessened with each initiative and two of the three requests were ultimately granted. Slowly but steadily, the amount of English in the Elmwood church increased, especially in the areas of Redekopp's special interest. Both the Sunday school and congregational youth activities became overwhelmingly English. A process of transition had begun without any evidence of crisis or opposition in the congregation. Contenting himself with trial innovations but using these as precedents, he was able to retain the support of the council but avoid bringing changes to the membership. Church members were not given any opportunity to take a stand against increased English exposure, and general support for Redekopp remained strong enough to preclude a direct challenge on the issue.

Evidence for Redekopp's handling of the language question is found in the weekly bulletins. The second Sunday evening of most months was now reserved for an English outreach service. A "Homebuilders" group for couples interested in learning how to establish Christian homes was added. The uniformly German bulletin was augmented by a daily English prayer guide for the week and by occasional English devotional thoughts. The guide's wording and content suggest it was produced by the youth. According to the activities listed, young people were active in community nursing homes, hospitals, a boys' home, the Union Gospel Mission, a Good Tidings Club for children, corresponding with missionaries, as well as planning

and presenting the monthly Sunday outreach services, the German *Jugendverein* and the Wednesday evening youth program at the church. The only German element in this ambitious schedule would have been the *Jugendverein*.

This crowded schedule of activity introduces another reason why the language issue remained relatively quiet at Elmwood. The youth group had evolved into a self-sufficient English subcongregation. It is important to note that the youth included more than adolescents. Bible college students attending Elmwood and all unmarried young adults in their twenties were also potential members. The more mature supplied leadership and served as role models for the younger. The group was at least 200 strong and Redekopp had organized them into subgroups and subcommittees such as the Wednesday Evening Committee, the Missions Committee, the *Jugendverein* Committee, the Promotion Committee and the Social Committee. From 1955 on, the eighteen to twenty-five aged Sunday school department was all English. Thus, they had access to English language Bible teaching and spiritual nurture, social activity, and many outlets for service and skill development. Probably they regarded the Sunday services, and especially the Sunday morning service, as occasions for service, but not necessarily as one of their best sources of spiritual nurture.

This large and growing English subcongregation had been developing for about a decade, and this may account for the efforts to bring the *Jugendarbeit* under increasing congregational control. At the same time, the youth felt less need to press for more services in English. Young people who were twenty-five years old in 1955, had been born shortly after the *Russländer* influx, and being reared in German immigrant homes, were conversant in German. Thus it was not youth but Christian Education leaders concerned about children not yet incorporated into this subcongregation, who broached the subject of English preaching. This next step in accommodation would ultimately require the endorsement of the members, producing Elmwood's first real test on the language issue. On September 13, 1956 the council considered a question recorded as follows (in transla-

tion):

Seeing that most of our children are no longer able to understand everything in a German sermon, the question is raised: Would it not be wise if children under a certain age were presented with the sermon in the English language? This produces a long discussion and eventually it is decided to conduct an experiment by conducting an English service with the children concerned on a Sunday evening in the basement auditorium, this to occur while the German sermon is being presented in the upper main auditorium.¹¹

Action was prompt as council members now recognized that maintaining a unilingual German congregation not only limited its ability to meet the needs of the surrounding English speaking community, but also threatened the spiritual welfare of Elmwood Mennonite Brethren children. Without further ratification by the membership, an inaugural "Junior Service" was held on the evening of Sunday, October 28, in the church basement during the German service in the main auditorium, and immediately became yet another English addition to the monthly menu of English services.

It was clear, however, that such half measures were inadequate and six months later B. B. Fast, minister and former leader of the congregation, presented a plan prepared by Redekopp's Christian Education Committee. A critique of the *Gebetstunde*¹² was followed by the clarion declaration, "We in the congregation are not doing right by those who do not understand German!" As a matter of justice and fairness, the committee believed the *Gebetstunde* should be dropped in favour of a short English sermon.¹³ Rejection was immediate, coming strongly from prominent council members. Redekopp then asked that the council make a definite decision even if only to conduct a trial for one or two Sundays. Before a motion was entertained, David Ewert was asked to say a special prayer. The special interruption of the debate for prayer indicates the extreme gravity with which this question was being considered. After the prayer, J. A. Toews moved that the question be brought before the member-

ship to gain its opinion on the issue. This was accepted with two contrary votes.

In effect, the conservative Toews had appealed to the membership over the heads of the Christian Education Committee. The formal vote, the recording of the vote, and the decision itself were very unusual. Most Elmwood council decisions were reached by consensus, sometimes hard-won in debate, but consensus nevertheless. The language issue forced the council into a more formal decision-making mode. The failure of consensus and the decision to take the question, unresolved, to the membership was most extraordinary for Elmwood. At the conclusion of the discussion Redekopp asked that someone else lead the discussion of this issue at the membership meeting. He was voted down and asked to do it himself. When the membership met it rejected the substitution of an English sermon for the *Gebetstunde*, saying that while it was important for children to understand the sermon, the existing arrangement should continue for the present.

On September 20 Pastor Redekopp again raised the issue. Another long discussion ensued, but this time concluding with consensus. They would recommend the English sermon to the membership as a trial until the annual membership meetings, but the German sermon must not be shortened. After thorough discussion, the membership approved the plan by show of hands, but during the trial period, the Wednesday evening Bible study and prayer meeting would begin a half hour earlier to compensate for the lost *Gebetstunde*. The controversial plan to substitute an English sermon for the German Sunday morning prayer-time, first proposed by the Christian Education Committee in January 1957, had finally been accepted eight months later in September.

While their elders debated the English sermon, the youth continued their activist habits, instituting a mission that would ultimately bring the congregation to the point of ultimate decision on the language issue. The Sunday afternoon "Good Tidings Sunday School," initiated and launched under the auspices of the Youth Missions Committee in November 1958, soon had

100 students. Teachers personally visited homes in the community and invited children. Obviously the school filled a need in the community and the Elmwood youth subcongregation was again in the forefront of innovation and outreach with the apparent blessing of the larger membership and leadership, so long as there was little disturbance of the status quo.

Why was a community Sunday school specially scheduled in the afternoon when it would have been much easier to incorporate a new outreach emphasis into the existing Sunday morning school? Several factors were at work. The congregation was not willing to concede the Sunday morning school entirely to the English language and may have been trying to reinstate German where it could. Annual statistics for the language being used in Sunday school between 1956 and 1962 point to a cessation of German instruction followed by its reintroduction in the younger classes. The congregation was not ready to give up the struggle for German in favour of community outreach. The principle behind the segregated vacation Bible school of 1954 remained operative. The youth found an alternative in the Good Tidings Sunday School.

Determination to hold the line against further erosion of German is evident in the evangelistic meetings scheduled for autumn 1958. The council stipulated that the services should be in German with some English for the youth at the beginning of each evening. One important aim of these meetings was to provide an occasion for the youthful adherents of the congregation to experience a public conversion on the way to formal church membership. From this perspective, it is difficult to understand the insistence on German except that the older and some leading members refused to acknowledge the English reality any more than absolutely necessary. Retrenchment, however, was not limited to language.

On November 28 Redekopp moved the dissolution of his Christian Education Committee, citing opposition to its activities and function. The council agreed. It is likely that over the four years, creative leadership initiative had become centred in the Education Committee, and the council had found itself compet-

ing against the congregational agenda. While the irritant of the Education Committee had been removed, a modest reform was also introduced as, for the first time, six members at large were voted to the council. This was in addition to the traditional structure of leader, assistant leader, secretary and all ordained ministers and deacons. Nevertheless, the Christian Education Committee had an important accomplishment to its credit. After a provisional period of fifteen months, the Elmwood membership ratified the English Sunday morning sermon on December 8, 1958.

Seven years had passed since congregational leader D. K. Dürksen and Sunday school leader J. Wedel had declared language to be the most serious problem in the Sunday school. In granting its grudging blessing to the English Sunday morning sermon, the Elmwood membership had reluctantly made what it considered a major concession. To accede to an English sermon in place of the German *Gebetstunde* was to acknowledge that Elmwood Mennonite Brethren could no longer present themselves as the stalwart guardians of *Deutsch und Religion*. They too were becoming *verenglisched*. Admitting English preaching was no graceful gesture of outreach and mission. The strongly-worded appeal of the Christian Education Committee on behalf of Elmwood's own children had barely carried the day and it appears that the sense of congregational mission held by most Elmwood members did not include a vision for incorporating their English-speaking neighbours into the mainstream of the congregation. They were determined that this first concession would also be their last. Similar to Winkler in 1965, Elmwood considered bilingualism the end of language accommodation, not the beginning, and the period leading up to 1968 represents a protracted process of frustration and denial, followed by further incremental accommodation punctuated by periodic redefinitions of the status quo.

• *Frustration, Alienation and Malaise*

Whereas the language transition in Winkler was a story of passion and politics bordering on intrigue, the Elmwood experience exhibits manipulation met by repression and passive resistance, leading to frustration and guilt. At the 1959 annual meetings Pastor Redekopp virtually invited the membership to terminate his service after delivering a Jeremiah-like report on the spiritual state of the congregation. German school chairman A. C. DeFehr lamented the attrition of his mother tongue by invoking the innocent wisdom of little children at play in the German language. The Good Tidings Sunday School, perhaps unconsciously, acted out the incipient alienation of the English subcongregation by being the first to present a formal report to the membership in English. Two years later it was the turn of Good Tidings leaders to protest Elmwood's failure to integrate community children into Sunday morning worship, and to suggest that this rejection was also being projected onto Good Tidings workers. By 1963 the congregation stood poised for a new round of controversy about the Sunday morning sermon.

Twin Sunday school reports in September 1959 demonstrated the latent language tension in the congregation. Herman Doerksen of the Good Tidings Sunday School, writing in English, reported thirty-eight children enrolled by Christmas of 1958 and seventy-one by September 1959, with an average attendance of thirty.¹⁴ Good Tidings teachers continued their home visitation program in the community and ten community children had been sent to summer camp. This account of active community outreach was contrasted with a congregational Sunday school report dealing mostly with language. A detailed tabulation of classes by language showed that only in the one to three-year-old beginner department did German still predominate, after which it dropped sharply and was not mentioned at all for classes above age twelve.

The report supports the inference that efforts to sustain German in the congregational Sunday school were succeeding only so long as children were very young. By the time children

reached the age of five and six, only one German class was possible compared to five in English, and classes with students above age eleven had abandoned German altogether. It is also plain that segregation by language was practiced within the congregational Sunday school, no doubt for very good practical reasons, but with the result that language was virtually eliminated as an obstacle to integrating the Sunday morning and the afternoon Good Tidings Sunday schools. A steadily growing Elmwood membership, however, had created another barrier to Sunday school integration, as by 1959 all departments reported a severe shortage of space. The addition of thirty more community children may have overtaxed the already limited space available for the congregation's own children. The crowded Sunday school facilities resulted from a burgeoning membership rapidly growing to a 1961 record of 652, a figure almost double the membership when Redekopp became pastor in 1953.¹⁵

Such increase, however, did not signify health and strength to Redekopp. There was a growing spirit of worldliness and legalism in the congregation, he lamented, with the result that few were being converted. Furthermore, rapid congregational growth was lessening "intimate contact" between members, and the sense of *Gemeinde* was being lost.¹⁶ Members were making material progress but lacking enthusiasm for missions and prayer. The one positive note in Redekopp's report was his judgment that the bilingual Sunday morning service had prevented a severe division in the congregation.

While Redekopp's lifeline of encouragement was the English sermon, German school chairman A. C. DeFehr reiterated his conviction that multilingualism enhanced unity and communication. Current attendance was eighty-seven children¹⁷ but the congregation must redouble its efforts at language education. He emphasized his point with a story borrowed from a recent *Canadian Mennonite* editorial about "two little Mennonite girls," aged four and five, who had stopped their play for a moment, and between themselves, agreed to switch from English to German so that their attending grandparents might understand them. DeFehr's conclusion was that Mennonites had "an obli-

gation before God, man and history to break down language barriers by learning additional languages. ... German should not be dropped; [rather] English should be improved and Russian should immediately be added to the [North American Mennonite] curriculum."¹⁸

Redekopp may well have agreed with DeFehr, but the previous six years had left him on the verge of estrangement from his congregation. At the conclusion of the meetings, Redekopp publicly enumerated his "failings," asked the members' forgiveness, and withdrew, allowing them to discuss his continuation.¹⁹ The members apparently declined the implicit invitation to ask for a change in leadership, but over the next seven years until his resignation, Redekopp found repeated occasions to draw public attention to the congregation's shortcomings, as well as to what he considered to be his own failings. The positive and incisive edge of his early leadership had been dulled and there was ample evidence that Redekopp had become hesitant and tentative while signs of malaise and disaffection multiplied.

The lone accommodation in 1959-1960, an English Wednesday evening Bible study, points to a weakening in the English subcongregation. The subcongregation was not being rejuvenated as the spirit of activism waned among the post-war youth. Now, the older *Russländer* children who had formerly been the backbone of the subcongregation, had young families of their own and less time for church activities. At the same time, they needed religious nurture and support in continuity with their previous English religious experience.²⁰ The adult congregational program, however, remained largely oriented to their German-retaining elders, despite the English sermon and the monthly mission service. This was the background to Pastor Redekopp's September 1960 recommendation that a new English Bible study be started for married and unmarried persons not attending the existing Wednesday evening program. The members agreed to test the new group, but again, only on a provisional basis until the annual meetings, retaining their right to jettison or amend the innovation.

The new English mid-week Bible study was not enough

to redress the growing disaffection of younger members. It appears that attendance at the new Wednesday evening Bible study was disappointing, as Redekopp accused younger parents of laxity in Bible study and prayer.²¹ He attributed this to the pressures of urbanization and the distractions and activities offered by the city. These were not evil in themselves, he added, but members should distinguish what was good from what was best. He did not show any awareness that these young parents had formerly been part of an English congregation within the church, but now, as they were assumed adult responsibilities and needed the resources of the congregation's mainstream program, a minor accommodation such as the English mid-week Bible study would not validate their place and worth in the congregation.

The breakdown of the subcongregation was also undercutting the congregation's capacity to sustain its traditional German programming. A good example is the attrition of German in the long-standing monthly *Jugendverein*. Throughout 1960 the monthly programs included more and more English until German disappeared almost entirely in March 1961. This meant that almost half the evening services were now in English, but the monthly Sunday evening communion services remained German. Redekopp was not depending on Sunday evening services to reintegrate the congregation, however. His focus was on Wednesday evening that offered an all-family program of Christian education. An age-graded Bible study program structured into groups for adults, young adults, young people, junior young people and children had been instituted in 1958. In 1962 the program was restructured again creating special attractions for children, no doubt also a strategy to involve their parents, and in 1963 two popular evangelical para-church programs were adopted. An announcement accompanying the 1962 restructuring appealed for young people "to show some real loyalty" to their church, and attempted to draw "all who are terribly busy" to English Bible study, indicating that the active and loyal English subcongregation was in serious decline and in danger of drifting away from the congregation.²²

As the German face of the congregation became increas-

ingly anachronistic, Redekopp resumed some very cautious attempts at adjustment. The depth of this caution is illustrated by how carefully he manipulated so trivial a matter as the format headings in the bulletin. For some time Redekopp had been drawing attention to the 9:30 a. m. beginning of Sunday school with an invitational comment, an inspirational thought or a special announcement—invariably in German. In early 1961 this was replaced by a German Bible verse, which in February began to be titled, in English, as a “Call to worship.” For the next six months, as if Redekopp was being called to account for every word of English that appeared, this item shifted in language and content until it reverted to German again until August 1962. Throughout 1963 the “Call to Worship” heading and Bible text switched languages at apparent random.

Redekopp also experimented with the exterior of the bulletin. In July 1961, the frontispiece adopted an expansive English invitation to the doubtful, the fearful, the lonely and the friendless, coupled with an announcement of Redekopp’s office hours.²³ The effusive English welcome, “open[ing] wide the door” to “the fellowship of Jesus,” contrasted sharply with the interior content of the bulletin that was totally German except the single heading, “Call to Worship.” The conflict of invitation and outreach being frustrated by language is neatly illustrated. This profoundly ambiguous relationship between congregation and community, and the frustrated alienation it was fostering surfaced again in 1962. Subsequent to the collapsing of Redekopp’s Christian Education Committee in 1958, a new Education Committee had formed which included the Good Tidings Sunday School in its portfolio. Now the Education Committee took a position of advocacy on behalf of Good Tidings students and staff, advising the membership that the students were not being sufficiently drawn into Sunday morning worship and that the staff was beginning to feel abandoned by the congregation. No action was taken on the complaint.

Behind the public face of the congregation, its working language was becoming increasingly English but strong contrasts persisted. The June 17, 1962, bulletin listed thirty-nine books

overdue at the congregation's library. Of these, thirty-five were English titles, most them children's books. The July 8 bulletin featured a German-language invitation to anyone interested in applying for baptism although most, if not all, of those targeted by the notice would have had English as his or her first language. Further contrast existed between leaders. Designated senior leaders, including Redekopp himself, persisted in maintaining German as their working language in congregational affairs. The vacation Bible school staff application and certificate of recognition, and the schedule of rationale and objectives prepared by 'VBS' superintendent Wendelin Mann were all in English. The contrast in working languages was also illustrated at the 1962 annual meetings, as Christian education and community outreach reports tended to be in English, whereas German reports were presented by the older Elmwood establishment. The next year, English reports outnumbered German.

The four years after the ratification of English Sunday morning preaching were a period of suppressed language frustration and confusion. The conservatives were determined to stall further language accommodation, while younger adult members moved up the age profile and slowly brought their English habits to bear. Redekopp, ever trying to be sensitive to everyone's needs and expectations and troubled by what he saw as the congregation's deepening spiritual malaise, suffered through a phase of personal frustration and vacillation. At no time between 1959 and 1963 did the council or the membership release the pent-up tension in open discussion, or confront the language problem directly. Beginning in January 1963, however, acknowledgment of Elmwood's hidden English reality increased sharply, so that twenty-one months later, virtually without debate or decision, the relative status of German and English had been substantially reversed.

Analysis of the 1963 bulletins shows that language and audience began to match more closely. A regular notice to young parents offering a supervised nursery during the morning worship service began to appear in English. The March 24 bulletin had an English notice for the men's fellowship, the mid-

week children's program, baptismal candidates, and all engaged couples. More evidence of genuinely bilingual worship also emerges. A hand-written annotation on Redekopp's working copy of the March 31 bulletin stipulated that the sermon at the evening baptismal service would be in English, despite the German order of service. This is the first evidence of English being used in a service of ordinance. On June 9 the bulletin provides the first evidence of the choir singing an English benediction at the conclusion of the service. The other three choir songs are un-named. The two congregational hymns were German. By autumn the *Jugendverein* service had been re-named "Young Peoples Service," and on October 27, seven of the seventeen bulletin notices were in English. In December the frontispiece of the bulletin became completely English. Six of the nine items on the agenda of the December annual meetings appeared in English suggesting that the working language of membership meetings had substantially changed, although the minutes remained German.

The trend, established in 1963, continued the next year so that by September 6 the orders of service for morning worship and evening communion were published in English. In the remainder of the bulletin, on three pages of typescript, only three German notices appeared. One was a greeting to the sick and shut-in. The second was a prayer list of those who were ill. The third was a notice to the ministers and deacons. This transformation in the bulletin shows that Elmwood was finally acknowledging its language transformation. The language of the congregation's mainstream had become English, and German was more a courtesy to older members. Alterations in attitude and worship practice support this conclusion. On February 16, 1964, an English congregational hymn was added to the traditional three German congregational hymns and retained as a regular part of Sunday morning worship. The German school elected to present a special program on Pentecost Sunday, symbolizing a nicely nuanced rationale for its existence. June 14 marked an evening service for baptism and communion; the sermon was delivered in English.

All this indicates that the balance of bilingualism had incrementally tipped to the English side during 1963 and 1964. The entire process had occurred with only one recorded decision; the January 13, 1964, council meeting re-affirmed the place of "*Gebet von etlichen Bruedern*"²⁴ in the order of service. The next step in transition, however, could not be denied due process or acknowledgment, as the congregation again faced the issue of preaching and language.

Staving Off Linguistic Segregation

In the last three years of language transformation the focus was again on the issue of Sunday morning worship, identity and mission. Three significant factors already identified in this study supplied the motivating force for the final stage. A portion of the congregation remained determined to retain as much German as possible. Second, Elmwood could no longer deny that the vibrant English subcongregation was gone and the congregation was now struggling to integrate its youth. Third, the Good Tidings Sunday School challenged Elmwood to resolve the contradiction of outreach and mission versus congregational boundary maintenance enforced by linguistic separatism. Before the process of language transition could advance, however, Elmwood needed to validate the incremental changes that had occurred since 1958. The resolution of the language issue only occurred when Pastor Redekopp's resignation induced the usual period of adjustment in preparation for a new leader.

Redekopp seized the language initiative again in September of 1964 by proposing to council that the English sermon be scheduled after the German sermon and that the Sunday school period be shortened fifteen minutes and commence at 9:45 instead of 9:30. Apparently a two and a half hour Sunday morning schedule was forcing families with young children to make a decision between an English Sunday school and a substantially German worship service. Some parents may have left after the English sermon to shorten the morning for their children, so as to

lessen their burden of boredom and propensity to misbehaviour. Shortening the Sunday school period and placing the English sermon second would forestall people leaving early and disrupting the service. The proposal also raised the matter of language status. In Mennonite Brethren practice, when two sermons were preached the senior minister invariably preached last, giving the second sermon priority over the first. Redekopp's proposal placed the German sermon first in sequence, giving the impression that the English sermon was the main address.

After delaying its decision for a week, the council agreed to a two-month trial. Both sermons would be of equal length with the German sermon still first, but in exchange, more German had to be included in the bulletin. The impression that Redekopp had rebounded to his earlier strategy is supported by the fact that this did not go to the membership immediately for approval. Redekopp's technique of innovation by precedent and trial was again operative, but this did not endanger his standing with the congregation. The September 24 membership meeting affirmed his leadership, voted him an extra month's salary for a trip, and suggested that the congregation consider engaging an assistant leader to lessen his workload.

In effect, the September initiative secured council approval of the reversal in German language status developing over the previous two years, and introduced a change to accommodate the parents and children of younger families. As a trade-off, there had been an attempt to roll back the profile of English in the bulletin. Redekopp managed this latter challenge very adroitly. The November 22, 1964, bulletin was almost completely English, as had been the case for some time. The November 29 bulletin had exactly one page of German content with the schedule for the week printed twice, once in German and once in English. Redekopp adhered to this German content rule scrupulously from this point on, developing it into a format that gave the impression that English was the main language of the congregation and the German page was a translation included as a concession to German-speakers.

In December the council again confronted the language

issue, as an unspecified person proposed that separate German and English services be started with the German service being held during Sunday school. Most council members rejected this, saying it would cause a rift in the congregation, but after discussion council asked Redekopp to confer with the Wednesday evening Bible study group.²⁵ This left the door open to further discussion, and in February 1965 the council finally decided to bring the issue to the membership for a thorough discussion and conclusion. The council and Leadership Committee presented a detailed recommendation requesting the membership to take action so that confusion and discontent might be forestalled and the strength of the congregation preserved.

The recommendation itself consisted of six separate resolutions, most of which asked the membership to ratify recent innovations. Thus, the membership agreed to the new Sunday morning schedule, the new bulletin format, the placing of the English sermon in second place and the understanding that with the exception of communion, most Sunday evening services would be in English. The final resolution, to "be thankful for the unity of young and old in the congregation," achieved unanimous agreement.²⁶ The congregation cleared its language agenda, and as the council requested, concluded. By ratifying the incremental adjustments since the previous decision in 1958, English had been granted legitimate status while the proposal to create two unilingual worship options had been denied. It is probable that the conservative segment of the council and the membership considered the language matter now closed.

Six months later the issue was opened again as the Education Committee prepared for a new season. In 1962 the committee had alerted the membership that it needed to integrate the English mission school into the mainstream of the congregation and bridge the alienation being felt even by the Good Tidings staff. Now the Education Committee presented the council with a specific recommendation to integrate the Good Tidings school into the regular Sunday morning Sunday school, and the council agreed in principle. Three weeks later Redekopp, on behalf of the Education Committee, laid a complex implementation plan

before the council that revived a version of the separate services proposal with specific intent to enable the Good Tidings Sunday school students from the community to attend worship without being subjected to a German service. As rationale for the proposal Redekopp specifically asked that everyone in the congregation cooperate in this effort to validate its outreach-mindedness. After a thorough discussion the council finally agreed to recommend that the congregation approve a four-month trial to begin on the second Sunday of October.

Now the congregation would face a clear choice between its sense of mission and the language issue. The Good Tidings Sunday School had an enrollment of 150 with an average attendance around ninety, and a staff of twenty-six. There were twelve age-graded classes for children and an adult class consisting of women from the community.²⁷ Obviously, the Good Tidings mission showed promise of becoming a genuinely effective outreach into the community. Its very size, however, also represented a substantial threat to the congregation. It was really being asked to give up its bilingual service in a bid to integrate *Engländer* into its midst.

The question was put to the membership on a formal ballot at the September 23, 1965, annual meeting. Three recommendations were presented, two of which related to the Good Tidings question. The Good Tidings integration was introduced with an expanded resolution explaining that the recommendation came with the support of the Education Committee, the council, and the Good Tidings staff. It specifically conveyed a plea by the Good Tidings workers that the congregation open its hearts to these children and adults, and welcome them into the regular Sunday school and Sunday morning worship.²⁸ The Elmwood membership refused to countenance even a trial experiment as they rejected the principle of integration seventy-six to sixty. The separation of services also received eighty-one votes in favour, sixty-two against and twenty-six abstentions but the initiative failed because it was treated as a change in constitution requiring two-thirds approval, and the abstentions were counted as votes for the status quo. A simple majority of the members vot-

ing would have passed the proposition, but would also have caused a serious split in the congregation, and ruined any chance that the Good Tidings group would have been genuinely welcomed into the fold. Elmwood still valued the German language and its internal congruence more than genuine missionary outreach into the community.

Ironically, at the same meeting where the members refused to integrate the Good Tidings Sunday School, they also heard their leaders lament a deepening spiritual malaise in the congregation. Pastor Redekopp set the tone, asking:

What causes us concern is that interest in Spiritual matters is not getting stronger. The spirit of prayer is not growing, and the Bible is no longer orienting our judgments. Can we not mutually encourage one another to the work of intercession, willing service, and healthy constructive criticism?²⁹

Then deacon chairman H. H. Unruh spoke movingly about the profound alienation from the larger congregation some members were feeling. Youth leader Henry Konrad admitted the failure of the youth organizations to engage the more than one hundred young people attending the church. Finally, deacon Abe W. Schellenberg, chairman of the Education Committee, stressed that workers for the Sunday school were becoming increasingly difficult to recruit. These reports presented a serious diagnosis of congregational ills compared to ten or fifteen years earlier.

Elmwood seemed to slip ever deeper into decline in 1966. While the total membership count remained strong at 630, other signs of youthful disaffection stood out starkly. Declining youth group attendance had forced the early suspension of activities in March and in September the youth meetings could muster no more than thirty. The Wednesday evening Bible studies were poorly attended. The Sunday evening services, now almost completely English, did not attract the English-speakers in the congregation. The 200-member youth organization of fifteen years earlier was completely gone and disbanded, its only remaining legacy to the Elmwood congregation the Good Tidings Sunday School, now recently rejected by the congregation.

The malaise, however, went beyond the youth. Even the German school had lost its former glory. It had seventy-eight students but was multi-congregational and interdenominational. Furthermore, membership meetings were attracting less than a quarter of members, leading the council to announce that attendance would be taken at each membership meeting and missing members would be contacted to explain their absence. On January 16, 1967, Pastor Redekopp tendered his resignation, citing language as a factor in his decision.³⁰ The council accepted his resignation with regret, and Redekopp briefly announced his resignation to the membership two days later.

An anonymous German letter dated May 3, 1967, directed to Pastor Redekopp and assistant leader David Ewert, points to some of the pressure that seems to have contributed to Redekopp's resignation.³¹ Judging from its style and content, the middle-aged male author was not of Elmwood's inner leadership circle, and had come to Canada in 1952. The writer claimed specifically that God had moved him to the thoughts he was about to express.³² Citing Revelation 2:1-7 and 3:1-6 as biblical support, he argued that if the congregation valued and really loved its elderly, then it would not be moving toward the elimination of German from the morning worship service. Elmwood's elderly had been much sinned against as second-generation children of immigrant Mennonite Brethren, highly educated at great sacrifice to their parents, now spurned their elders in refusing to tolerate bilingual worship and demanding English-only services. The letter concluded with an appeal for unity around the principle of bilingualism and invited those not willing or able to accept this to join one of the two new English-speaking Mennonite Brethren congregations in Winnipeg.³³ The final appeal was for a special series of weekly meetings for prayer and fasting to invoke a spirit of unity and the blessing of God.

The significance of the letter for the present study is its claim to represent the sentiments of Elmwood's elderly. They did not believe that the youth could not understand German. The drive for an English service was a sign of ingratitude, disrespect

and arrogance. There was no hint of understanding for the conflict of mission and language identity. The letter also points to gathering impatience with the bilingual service.³⁴ The English majority saw the change in leadership as an opportunity to resolve the language issue, and this was fostering a heightened sense of threat among the German-retainers. There is no record of the letter being discussed by the council.

The anonymous letter writer's concern to secure Elmwood's remaining German usage during leadership transition was well placed. Next month the Pastoral Search Committee nominated William Schmidt, speaker for the Gospel Light Hour, the English-language radio ministry of the Manitoba Conference, as a possible pastoral candidate. At the same meeting, with Pastor Redekopp in the chair, the council agreed to pursue separate English and German services. When, a week later, the council explored the possibility of a summer trial for separate services with the membership, some feared that even this would cause a schism in the congregation, but younger members emphasized that this was the time to make a change. No decision was made.

On June 27 the council voted to present Schmidt to the membership as a candidate for pastor. There was no discussion of language in outlining his responsibilities but council decided to appoint a moderator from the congregation to chair membership meetings. The next day the membership thoroughly discussed the language issue again. The members voted by ballot, 123 to 50, to implement the English service on a summer trial. The membership also voted by a majority of over 80 per cent to call William Schmidt as pastor. Again, there was no mention of language as the members reviewed their expectations of Schmidt. With the language question and the leadership being decided simultaneously, and the decision to engage a pastor with public experience in English-language outreach, one can infer that Schmidt was appointed in the hope that a complete language transition would soon be ratified. On July 7 the new experimental order of service was put into effect, and on the same morning, William Schmidt's appointment as pastor was an-

nounced.

On August 16 the membership agreed with the council recommendation to delay the membership vote on the ratification of the split services. The council maintained it would be better to wait until Pastor Schmidt had begun his work and both he and the congregation together had opportunity to observe the new arrangement in action. The decisive vote would be held at the end of October. This would allow time for Pastor Redekopp's farewell before he left for a year's study at Southwestern Baptist Seminary prior to taking up the pastorate of the Willingdon Mennonite Brethren congregation in Vancouver.

When, after a second delay, the issue finally came to the December membership meeting it seemed that most members just wanted to be finished with the matter. Nevertheless, one last effort was made by the German old guard to delay ratification as it had done a decade earlier. When it was moved to maintain the order of service for Sunday mornings that had been in effect during a trial period, C. A. DeFehr moved an amendment that "the order of service be reviewed again at the end of another six month trial period." The amendment was defeated. The minute does not even record that the original motion was voted upon and accepted. Six months later the membership voted no longer to be responsible for the German school but to pass the oversight of the school to a committee of interested parents. The era of *Deutsch und Religion* at North End-Elmwood had formally ended.

In retrospect, the Elmwood language transition was a story of inexorable change resisted both passively and actively by a dwindling proportion of members determined to remain loyal to their heritage of language and religion at any cost. They failed to realize that one important result of the vigorous English-language outreach activity of the 1940s and 50s was that the new generation had severed this traditional connection. The vitality and survival of their religious life did not depend on the German language; rather, that life had matured precisely *because* the youth had moved outside their traditional boundaries to integrate their religion with their English-speaking environment.

When the mainstream of the congregation failed to validate this grafting of faith onto a new cultural medium, and actually closed its doors to outsiders to preserve its remnants of *Deutsch und Religion*, the religious vitality of the new generation waned and the congregation slipped into a reactionary malaise.

The Winkler and North End-Elmwood transitions were concluded within a month of each other and both had embarked on their first steps toward transition in the mid-fifties with the appointment of new pro-active pastors recruited from the faculty of Mennonite Brethren Bible College. One of the reasons Elmwood avoided schism was the skill and determination of I. W. Redekopp to balance the varying expectations within the congregation. Furthermore, the English subcongregation did much to bridge the language gap in the early stages of transition, but this also allowed the German mainstream to continue denying the surrounding English reality and the need to address its growing internal alienation. By the 1960s a certain amount of resignation had set in and many of the youth were not sufficiently committed to the issue to foment formally channeled dissent, much less to suggest starting a new congregation. Schism results from strong religious feeling and conviction, not apathy. It is impossible to say how long the apathy would have continued had Redekopp not resigned, thereby creating the sense of renewal needed to take the final step.

South End-Portage Avenue Case Study: From Denial to Suppression

The course of language transition in the South End-Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church demonstrates how the "*Sprachfrage*," or "language question," permeated some Mennonite Brethren congregations between 1950 and 1970. South End-Portage Avenue illustrates how essential the language issue is to a balanced understanding of Mennonite Brethren ethno-religion in this period. Between 1960 and 1964 South End Mennonite Brethren differentiated themselves into three separate congregations whose essential character was defined by language. The bulk of South End members became the bilingual Portage Avenue congregation. About one-third of the original South End members split away and formed the largely unilingual German Central Mennonite Brethren congregation. A small corps of outreach-minded activists, mainly younger South End-Portage Avenue members, nurtured a mission Sunday school started in 1957 until it became the unilingual English Brooklands congregation in 1964.

The subject of this case study is the original South End congregation and the Portage Avenue congregation that evolved from it. This group adopted a formal policy of bilingualism in 1957 and reaffirmed this stance five more times before acquiescing to separate English and German Sunday morning services in 1970. Complicating this analysis is South End's six-year struggle with a shortage of Christian education space. This agonizing controversy, beginning in 1957 and only resolved in 1962, ultimately produced the separate Central and Portage Avenue congregations. The analysis leading up to 1957 traces the development of the original South End congregation from its *Russländer* origins, through its spate of post-World War II growth, to its first significant confrontation of the language question in the mid-fifties. From the perspective of language transition, three developments come into particular focus. First, South End

readily embraced English as a medium of community outreach while steadfastly protecting its ethno-religious boundary. The addition of new immigrant members between 1947 and 1950 reinforced the ethno-religious-centricity of this *Russländer* congregation without lessening the linguistic complexity already present in the congregation. Finally, as already observed in both Winkler and North End-Elmwood, the catalyst for language transition proved to be the Christian education initiatives of a new and progressive pastor.

Tensions Defined

The early history of the Mennonite Brethren in Winnipeg has been outlined in the introduction to the North End-Elmwood case study. Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren thought of themselves as a single congregation even after the *Russländer* immigration swelled their ranks to produce three separate meeting points, and one of these second-generation *Ortsgemeinden* developed into the South End Mennonite Brethren congregation. Beginning to meet separately in the late 1920s, the South End group formed its own Sunday school, a *Jugendverein*, a women's society and a mid-week prayer meeting. In October of 1936 the South End congregation organized separately with eighty-six members representing some thirty-nine families. P. J. Kornelsen was appointed leader. Four years later South End had grown to 126 members, and in a divisive vote the congregation decided to buy an existing church building at the corner of William and Juno Streets in downtown Winnipeg.¹ During 1941 parents initiated, with congregational approval, both a German school and a German kindergarten but these were not integrated into the congregation's budget or governance. Despite these efforts, children began to resist attendance at Sunday morning worship, and the congregation decided that once a month its *Gebetstunde* would be replaced by a children's service provided by the Sunday school teachers. The language of this children's feature was not indicated.

By this time, young adults were taking vigorous initiative in various ministries and in September 1942 the membership claimed specific authority over the Sunday school, choir and *Jugendverein* in a hotly contested decision. At the same time, the congregation also expanded its children's ministry. Jacob Neufeld, leader of the Sunday school teachers, suggested a youth class for boys and girls be started. The congregation agreed. The problems with the congregation's children had not been resolved by the monthly children's service and these new classes were an additional attempt to reach out to them. At the annual meetings Jacob Neufeld reported that the Sunday school work was also difficult and he expected it to worsen; he did not attribute the problems to language or any other cause.

South End had situated itself on the edge of Winnipeg's downtown core and some younger progressive South End leaders were ready to exploit this urban location. In 1942 David Redekopp, a young lay leader, started an English mission school class for children. During 1943 this work was developed through home visitation and Bible distribution, integrated into the South End program and brought under the direct supervision of the council. As the congregation assimilated the new English mission effort, it also reversed its former policy and integrated the German school into its program by forming a German School Committee. This was not, apparently, a response to any difficulty in the German school because, in contrast to the worsening discipline problems reported in the Sunday school and even the new boys' club, the German school specifically denied having any difficulty with its nineteen students.²

While no link was being made between discipline problems and language, language was nevertheless beginning to become an issue in the congregation in 1944. David Redekopp and Jacob Neufeld, another young layman, had started a young people's Bible study group that used at least some English. Their concern may have been motivated by the fact that only thirty of the eighty South End young people over age thirteen had been baptized into church membership.³ After a long debate, the council agreed to present Redekopp's group to the membership

for endorsement but with the stipulation that the work must be done in German. Thus, the most progressive in the congregation already recognized the need for more English. The council, however, was determined to forestall any accommodation within the congregation, but it was willing to support these innovators in their use of English as an outreach tool—at a safe social distance beyond the congregation's boundaries.

The 1944 annual meetings also revealed other difficulties in the congregation. Leader Kornelsen lamented that Bible study and prayer meetings were poorly attended. Obviously discouraged, he said he was giving up his attempts to correct the situation because he believed the members did not want to change. The mission school, however, seemed to flourish with some 150 students registered, continuing Bible distribution in the community, and the establishment of an English library. At the same time, he also alluded to unspecified problems connected to the use of the English language. The next year the mission school continued, now structured into three departments served by eight teachers and using a formal graded curriculum. It met on Sunday afternoons with about fifty children, 70 per cent of whom had little religious background.

Finally, in 1946, accumulating tensions between Kornelsen and some other congregational leaders reached the breaking point. Kornelsen informed the council he would not stand for re-election as leader. It would seem, however, that Kornelsen and assistant leader Jacob Neufeld had prepared for a transition. Neufeld revealed that North End member and Bible college instructor Heinrich H. Janzen was open to being nominated as leader. Kornelsen moved that the council recommend Janzen for leadership, and several days later the membership agreed. Kornelsen remained a minister in the congregation and a member of council.

The roots of an internal divergence between the German mainstream and youthful English activists became more evident as the transition in leadership proceeded. David Redekopp approached the membership on the subject of an English weeknight Bible study, asking them to designate a room in the church

basement for his use. This points to the beginning of a problem in the *Jugendarbeit*. The Thursday evening *Jugendabend* had grown to ninety as young adults from southern Manitoba migrated to the city for work and study. The exclusively German *Jugendverein*, however, was in trouble as the young people's attendance and interest were flagging. Although the youth were ambivalent about the *Jugendverein*, some remained strongly interested in outreach as a second community mission school was started in a new location.⁴

When Kornelsen's ten-year leadership tenure ended, the congregation had grown to a viable size and developed a full program of activities with special attention to the needs of its youth. The principle of paid leadership had been accepted and the congregation had settled into the William and Juno location. Some features of the congregation potentially relevant to language transition had become evident. Discipline had become a problem in the worship service, in the Sunday school and in the weekday program. These difficulties, however, were not being attributed to a growing linguistic disjunction between the program of the congregation and its children. Many youths seemed noticeably reluctant to join the church in formal membership. While the congregation had validated its ownership of the German school, support for the school was slipping. Despite a stable membership size, enrollment in the German school had been declining since 1944, dipping to fourteen in 1947.

On the other hand, some younger members of the congregation had expanded their vision to include the larger community, and with this came the first significant contact between the church program and the English language. A viable and growing English children's mission rivaled the congregation's own German Sunday school. In 1947 the congregational Sunday school had fifty-five students and fourteen workers; the mission school counted five classes, six workers and thirty-five to fifty children in attendance. Of these, 5 per cent were reported as German and the "others are brought in from the street."⁵ This almost pejorative denoting of some children as outsiders, standing parallel to a language reference, underscores the clear de-

lineation of English mission and German internal identity. In general, South End had not yet acknowledged that it too would face the challenge of language transition.

H. H. Janzen assumed the South End leadership in 1947, just as a third wave of Mennonite immigration was about to commence. Having returned from a pastoral sojourn among wartime European Mennonite refugees, Janzen attracted a large number of German-speaking Mennonite immigrants to South End. As the congregation welcomed such growth under the guidance of a charismatic and strongly pro-German leader, its problems seemed to melt away, although subtle indications of linguistic dissonance remained. While the need for more English was explicitly acknowledged by the council, the *Sprachfrage* produced no concrete change during Janzen's four-year term as leader. This is understandable; the arguments of the German-retainers seemed validated as South End was able to extend an immediate welcome and refuge to war-weary immigrants.

South End's membership more than doubled between 1947 and 1950 when the rate of increase began to tail off. This new German influx not only lent credibility to the pro-German position, but also significantly enhanced the viability of German program elements. German school attendance more than doubled to thirty-two students and it was explicitly stated that many of these new children were from refugee families. This trend continued until 1952, when a steadily widening gap between attendance and potential attendance appeared. Thus, the effect of the recent immigration on the German school was short-lived.⁶ For a time, the new émigrés masked the longer-term linguistic reality in the congregation but the only fundamental change was the addition of more determined German-retaining adult members to the congregation.

Despite this growing German-speaking membership, in March 1949, the council resolved that "In as much as there are young people with us who understand German only with difficulty or even not at all, the recommendation shall be made that from time to time, the youth evenings and the Christian Endeavour evenings shall have English addresses."⁷ No record of con-

crete action can be found, however. Awareness of these *vereng-lisched* youth and their needs seems to have been eclipsed by the record-number of forty-four baptism candidates who presented their testimonies at that next membership meeting. The motion does indicate that leaders thought the *Jugendabend* program was substantially German, and it also shows that only a very minimal amount of accommodation could be considered, even though leaders clearly understood that they had youth in their charge whose religious needs could not be met in the German language.

A strong sense of optimism was evident at the 1950 annual meeting. Janzen reported improved attendance and a positive spirit. Jacob Neufeld reported 261 members, forty-four baptisms and forty-nine new members by transfer. David Redekopp indicated forty new students in the congregational Sunday school, although ten had also moved away. Other young leaders reported about fifty students in the mission school, a German school with fifty-one students, and a recovering *Jugendverein*. Jacob Neufeld, however, reported that as other Winnipeg congregations established *Jugendabenden* similar to South End's, the group had shrunk to serving mainly its own. Amid this flurry of positive news, Janzen resigned the leadership, saying he did not have time for the increasing needs of the congregation besides his new responsibilities as president of the Bible College. He would, however, continue until July 1 by which time, he believed, the congregation should have appointed a full-time leader.

The next month the membership voted on assistant leader Jacob Neufeld's nomination as leader. Neufeld said it would be a sacrifice to give up his growing business for the full-time ministry, but he was willing, provided two-thirds of the membership endorsed his candidacy. The members appointed Neufeld as full-time leader with an indefinite term, and H. H. Janzen was acclaimed as assistant leader. Jacob Neufeld inherited the leadership of the congregation that had formed him as a leader. He had risen through the ranks as a Sunday school leader, youth leader and assistant congregational leader, and now he enjoyed virtually unanimous support. Neufeld must have felt his limita-

tions keenly because he negotiated permission to study the equivalent of one day a week at the Bible College. The pressure of conflicting demands facing him must have been considerable. The previous two decades had presented him with a complex congregation. It was English on the outside in its outreach ministry, and German on the inside with its first-generation immigrant adults. Moreover, between these two identities was squeezed a new generation of youth rapidly accommodating itself to the ways of English-Canadian society.

Language was not a significant issue in the initial years of Neufeld's pastorate. The congregation was too busy consolidating a growth rate that would transform it from the smallest Winnipeg congregation to being, briefly, the largest in 1954. When its growth peaked in 1959 with 553 members, it had grown by 480 per cent over its 1947 membership. Meanwhile, after peaking in attendance in 1949, German school attendance began a long-term decline at the same time as the number of potential students climbed steadily. In 1952 the German school was only able to attract a third of potential students and in 1956 this had dropped to a sixth. At first, apparently, refugee children had bolstered German school attendance, but after 1950 an increasing number of parents also were unable, or unwilling, to maintain their children in German school.

The council and the members, however, saw little reason to accommodate in the ever-expanding congregation those for whom German was becoming difficult or impossible. Rather, the mainstream of the membership settled into a conservative mind-set, ignored the attrition of German in its ranks, and refused to discuss any change in worship that might open the door to English innovation. At the same time, the congregation divested itself of its principal English language community outreach ministry.

Since 1943 the mission school had continued to expand, always enjoying strong moral support from the congregation. In 1951, however, the sentiment of the congregation changed. The school had been operating for almost a decade; its pre-adolescent converts were now of an age when Mennonite Brethren youths

were normally baptized into church membership, and this confronted South End with the question of mission and identity. Would it accept these *Engländer* converts as 'new' Mennonite Brethren?

When the issue was raised at a December 1951 council meeting, the answer came quickly. It was now time to pass the entire mission Sunday school on to the Conference-run Gospel Light Mission on Logan Avenue.⁸ Over the next two months the question was debated by council leaders and members before coming to resolution on January 24, 1952. At this meeting David Redekopp specifically appealed that the doors at South End not be closed; some children could be lost to the program as a result. Again, this precipitated a long discussion resulting finally in a motion "to transfer the English Sunday school to the [Gospel Light Mission] so that the children will receive care as they grow older and when they want to become baptized." This was carried with two contrary votes.⁹

Several issues had been at stake. Redekopp wanted the mission to remain physically attached to the Juno and William location because he feared a change in venue would cause some students to fall by the wayside. The congregation had other concerns. Over the years, the mission had reported a modest but steady number of conversions. Now, these young people had matured in their religious experience. Had they been part of the regular congregational Sunday school they would have proceeded naturally on to baptism and membership, but these were English-speaking youth "from the street." Language and ethnicity forced them out, even over the objections of people like David Redekopp. Despite the difficult South End decision, some people were still very interested in community outreach. At that very time, a new seven-person tract distribution group emerged, distributing some 11,000 tracts since the previous September, and now the group intended to start distributing German literature as well. Such activities, however, could be conducted safely at arm's reach from the congregation and its own programs and internal culture.

Maintaining the congregation's boundary against the

youth of its own mission did not protect South End young people from more accommodation to their urban English environment, and between 1950 and 1956 the council slowly moved toward recognizing this fact. For 1950 the *Jugendabend* had pursued the theme, "The Problems of the Youth in the City" at its monthly meetings. In 1952 leaders were admitting that 15 percent of the content of its youth program was in English, and in 1956 the *Jugendabend* was identified as being English. This increasing English usage in the youth program contrasts with the Sunday school where the line was held until 1956. Both youth work and Sunday school however reported a marked increase in English in 1957, the same year that South End adopted its bilingual policy. These developments must be set against the 1949 admission of the council that, already at that time, South End had young people who no longer understood German.

In 1954 Neufeld hazarded two language-related initiatives, one successful and the other not. During the first four years of his pastorate he had been extremely cautious, his style standing in stark contrast to the actions of J. H. Quiring at Winkler and I. W. Redekopp at Elmwood during their initial years. Now Neufeld asked the council whether the *Gebetstunde* might be discontinued on Sunday mornings. His suggestion met very strong resistance as the council not only insisted that no change be made in the Sunday morning *Gebetstunde* but also wanted the Wednesday evening Bible study and prayer meetings enhanced—and Saturday evening prayer meetings, which had been pre-empted by some youth activities, resumed.

Had the council and the members understood the implications of Neufeld's second request, their profound caution would have stiffened into even stronger denial. In November Neufeld recommended that the work of the congregation be integrated under an Education Committee. The council agreed to discuss the idea at the January annual meeting where Neufeld again explained the concept. The membership delayed a decision until the next meeting. In March he insistently re-introduced the idea to the council. The "brothers" serving in an Education Committee, he declared, must be sufficiently educated

and insightful to make and execute plans for the youth and the congregation. Finally the council agreed to form a committee of three consisting of G. Huebert, the assistant leader, A. Kroeker, a minister and Victor Adrian, a rising young leader. The membership remained to be convinced but now the idea had the backing of council.

Three months later, Neufeld again explained that the committee would be alert to the diversity of needs in the congregation and supervise all of its activities. Finally, the membership agreed and ratified the proposed committee members. Before the end of September the efforts of the new Education Committee were already in evidence. Just as in Winkler and Elmwood, it would be the vehicle through which progressive leaders brought about innovation. Perhaps more important, the action of such a group seemed to free others to advance their own ideas for change. In short order a youth choir had been approved and, despite opposition from some council members, the Youth Committee gained membership permission to host a Youth for Christ meeting. More significantly, in November 1955 the committee advised council that it had prepared a questionnaire to test the spiritual pulse of the congregation. The council approved the initiative.

The first six years of Neufeld's pastorate reveal that his caution was only exceeded by the council's. The congregation seemed to accept, if not actually demand, a conservative administration. In terms of language, the result was obvious. The long standing and growing English language needs of children and youth were being resolutely ignored. Part of the reason was evident at the 1955 annual meeting when it was revealed that almost 60 per cent of the 439 members were over thirty years of age and that a little more than a third of the members were young adults in their twenties.

While those approaching middle age and beyond controlled the congregation, there was also a very significant but impotent young adult segment. Until 1955 this segment had shown remarkable patience but Neufeld's Education Committee initiative and its promised questionnaire indicate the concern of

some leaders. Other concerns were also evident. David Redekopp warned that Sunday school space was an urgent need. Some 350 students were divided into fifteen classes so that their cramped classrooms accommodated an average of twenty-three students each. Neufeld also complained of low attendance. In a congregation with over 400 members, the average attendance at Wednesday evening Bible study and prayer meeting was only 65. At the close of 1955, the congregation stood on the verge of confronting the two major issues that would destroy its unity over the next half dozen years.

Achieving the Minimum of Bilingualism

The concept and the practice of bilingualism were subject to considerable variation. Where an individual or a congregation stood on *Zweisprachigkeit* revealed much about the longer-term prospects for language transition and how the boundaries of the congregation were defined. Winkler seems to have accepted bilingual worship with relative ease by 1967. Elmwood was balking at the English Sunday morning sermon in 1958. South End members took their stand on bilingual Sunday evening services in 1957. While the South End definition of bilingual accommodation came slightly earlier than Elmwood's, it was much more conservative. At South End, cooperating with the *verenglisched* meant the barest minimum of bilingual compromise. While South End tried to define its bilingual status quo earlier and more conservatively than Winkler and Elmwood, it also was the last of the three to abandon bilingualism.

It was impossible, of course, to maintain a 1957 position inviolate over the longer term, but during the next thirteen years to 1970 South End-Portage Avenue confirmed its bilingualism five more times, the last occasion only sixteen months before the end. The years 1956 and 1957 tell the story of how this bilingual status quo was forged. Several features already encountered elsewhere have become evident in the South End analysis also. Neufeld initiated an Education Committee two months after his

colleague Pastor Redekopp did so at Elmwood. This committee launched a strategy of polling the congregation with questionnaires as Winkler would a decade later. Discussion of the *Gebetstunde* signaled Neufeld's premature interest in adding some English to Sunday morning worship. Finally, underlying the whole scenario from 1954 on, there was a growing anxiety about Sunday school space. From 1956 on the language question and the facility question became more and more intertwined. The following analysis focuses on the language issue, and discusses the debate concerning Christian education space only as it impinges on language. Nevertheless, it is necessary to set the language issue within the context of parallel developments.

In January 1956 the shortage of space for Christian education had become critical. A Building Committee had already been formed and in February the membership approved the committee's plans to purchase a neighbouring house, owned by a South End member, to use for Sunday school classes. The next few months proved that the purchase of the 'Sunday school house' had not solved the problem and by August the Building Committee was conducting a preliminary search for a building site but finding prices prohibitive. In late September and early October, members engaged in lengthy and difficult debate focused on four options: maintain the status quo, divide the congregation, build an addition to the church, or build a new church. Finally, members authorized the Building Committee to search for a suitable building lot, and if successful, secure it with a deposit preparatory to ratification of such a purchase by the membership. At the same meeting, the treasurer reported that six weeks before the annual meetings, the budget was \$10,000 in arrears.

By the new year, the Building Committee was negotiating with the City of Winnipeg to purchase a portion of Osmond Park on Portage Avenue and the congregation authorized the committee to take immediate action if the city released the park for sale. In April the Building Committee reported to council that a down payment of \$5,000 had been made on the Portage Avenue lot, and the next week the council, the Building Com-

mittee, and the Finance Committee agreed to ask the membership to ratify the purchase of the Portage Avenue lot and to empower the Finance Committee to execute the purchase. By this time, however, the language debate was dominating the agenda and no record of such ratification can be found. The purchase of the Portage Avenue lot was merely announced at the conclusion of an intense language discussion May 29, 1957.

Together with the busy 1956 schedule of developments regarding Sunday school space and building properties, the council and membership seemed to awaken to other issues, the most important being language. Along the way, the council was sorting out its interdenominational linkages. The earlier opposition to Youth for Christ ended as the council gave that group permission to use the church once a week for its work among high-school students. Weeks later the council recommended that South End cooperate with the evangelical pastors of the city and purchase weekly newspaper advertisements to "work against" the Knights of Columbus at a cost of five dollars per month per hundred members, and the members agreed. Then, as members were making a decision about a building lot, the problem of children's discipline resurfaced as Pastor Neufeld reported that he was receiving many complaints about unruly behaviour during the services. No mention of language was recorded at that time, but within weeks that issue was also explicitly on the council agenda.

During this period the Education Committee was conducting its poll on the spiritual state of the congregation and it is likely this activity had focused attention on the language question. Someone on the council complained that many young people were going to "the other churches" and more should be offered for them in the South End congregation. More English should also be used in the Sunday school because many of the children did not know any German. The response of the council matches that of Winkler and Elmwood when they first realized they could no longer avoid the truth about their language situation. Pleading that the question was too new, the council declined to take action and tabled the issue for the next meeting.

The question was not new; the council had known for a decade that there were youth among them who knew little or no German. Only the realization that they must now stop denying this reality was new. Also typical was the broken promise to take up the issue immediately. The matter would wait from October until January when the Education Committee brought in its polling results. Nevertheless, the *Sprachfrage* was now on the South End agenda and it would soon divide the council and bring Neufeld to the point of collapse and resignation. At the same time, however, while their elders were wrangling about English, the youth launched a new arm's length Sunday school mission that eventually would become an independent English-speaking Mennonite Brethren congregation.

The Education Committee was ready with its report in January. Assistant leader G. D. Huebert reported detailed findings gleaned from the responses of some 197 homes. More than a quarter of the respondents reported German as their personal language preference, and almost half the homes reported German to be their domestic *Umgangssprache*. At the same time, the results indicated that the preference of German for religious purposes was apparently not based on necessity. Almost 90 per cent of the respondents admitted that they had no difficulty understanding English preaching. The data defined the issue for the council and, after a long discussion, it was moved to have the *Jugendverein* in English or German at the discretion of the youth. A further suggestion was to use both German and English each Sunday evening. Forty per cent of the council, however, voted against any suggestion of accommodation and no action was taken. Despite the fact that a great majority of members understood English well, they would continue to insist on German as their language of worship for quite some time, and this insistence would persist in spite of their frank admission that youth were leaving the congregation and their children could not understand the language.

Language and space were not the only crises to emerge in January 1957. At the very meeting at which the questionnaire results were presented, Pastor Neufeld took action to resign.

Presenting the council with a written statement, he declared his intent to step back from leadership if the congregation found another suitable leader. He specifically complained about the spiritual life in the congregation. The council responded with expressions of its unqualified support. Two weeks later, Pastor Neufeld explained his decision to resign, basing it on Luke 5:5. It was obvious that language was one of the several factors playing into his decision. There were many who no longer knew German and who needed to be served. Furthermore, two weeks of vacation annually were not enough, given the emotional strain of his leadership role. After further dialogue between the council and Neufeld, however, he declared that he had regained the freedom and courage to carry on.

While it appears that this leadership crisis erupted because the language problem could no longer be denied, there were other contributing factors as well. The building question was not resolved. Interpersonal tension remained a fact of life in the congregation. Neufeld mourned what he considered to be the low spiritual state of the congregation. With a membership of 521 and no staff, the pressures of his work must have been staggering indeed. The crisis, however, was averted. Neufeld's attempted resignation would seem to be symptomatic of the price he was paying for the language denial in the congregation. He and David Redekopp had been in the vanguard of emerging young leaders eager for English outreach and quite prepared to begin serving South End youth in English as well. He faltered under the load of conflicting demands and unfulfilled hopes. He surely was aware that a significant portion of the council would not respond generously to the picture presented by the Education Committee, and chose that moment of anticipated frustration to withdraw.

The council failed to agree on a constructive recommendation based on the language data before it brought the issue directly to the membership. Protracted discussion on January 30, however, narrowed the scope of possible accommodation. Although the overwhelming majority of the members understood English preaching they were not willing to consider any change

to Sunday morning worship. In March the membership tackled the language problem again. Again Neufeld's frustration was revealed. He explained that Jesus' words, "Give ye them to eat," had finally moved him to raise the problem. Again the matter was discussed—at length—from all sides. And again, because of insufficient time, the congregation decided to set the question aside until the remainder of the day's agenda was dealt with.

At the conclusion of the meeting a motion was made that in principle, the congregation would try to accommodate, or co-operate, with those who did not understand German. The membership agreed 104 to 43. Almost a third voted against the principle of extending any language accommodation. The second question was, "How much English shall the congregation have?" The Education Committee was asked to investigate how the other congregations were dealing with this issue and report to the members. Some members wanted more control of the process and were not ready to face any concrete proposal for specific action.

The Education Committee forged ahead, however. Seizing upon the members' decision to make some move toward language accommodation, the committee insisted it was time for implementation. When council agreed to present the committee's three alternate plans to the congregation, the members agreed to permit the use of English along side German in Sunday evening services.¹⁰ The accommodation made by the members was the most conservative of the options. German would not be excluded from any particular service and the amount of English admissible remained a matter of discretion. The members had rejected any approval of a regularly scheduled English sermon. Furthermore, any use of English was limited to Sunday evening services.

The process that finally yielded this very modest accommodation at the South End congregation was made possible by Neufeld's seven-month campaign to institute an Education Committee. The Education Committee rapidly concluded that the language problem seriously affected the quality of "*Seelsorge*," or pastoral care, in the congregation and forced the

members to confront the reality of linguistic diversity within the congregation. Neufeld's own near breakdown was occasioned, in part, by his estimation that many were being denied spiritual nurture because of the absence of English. He also realized that few members of the council and the congregation shared his concern. Still, Neufeld's Education Committee had successfully introduced some English. It is certain that the membership and the leadership now saw themselves as having passed a milestone of language accommodation; they had become a bilingual congregation. Their hope to set the language issue aside and concentrate on the Sunday school space problem, however, would soon be frustrated.

Bilingualism Reluctantly Expanded

When South End members decided to allow the use of English in Sunday evening services, the congregation was differentiated into three groups along a linguistic spectrum: a bilingual majority in the middle, a determined group opposed to any form of language accommodation on one side, and a less militant group interested in more accommodation on the other. The events of the next four years revealed that about a third of the congregation remained steadfast in its opposition to language transition. When bilingualism was extended to the morning service and then confirmed as the permanent policy of the congregation, this group seized an opportunity to break away and form a new less accommodationist congregation—the Central Mennonite Brethren Church. None of this, of course, was foreseen in 1957. In the year that followed, the South End leadership acted as if the language issue had been disposed of for the time being and expected the congregation to deal with the facilities issue in isolation. The separation of the language question and the facilities question proved impossible.

The language resolutions of March and May 1957 had ignored Sunday morning worship. The limitations of such minimal accommodation were soon apparent. By September the

behaviour of children on Sunday mornings was again an issue and over the winter a kind of "junior church" seems to have been instituted "to restore peace."¹¹ "Junior church" probably denoted an English children's service conducted in the basement of the church during the sermon. The innovation was tacit acknowledgment that the children of the congregation could no longer benefit from German preaching but that the membership was, as yet, unwilling to make any changes in the Sunday morning service itself. Furthermore, the new policy admitting English to the Sunday evening services was not working very well. Pastor Neufeld seemed reluctant to allow English preaching. The promised review of the new bilingual policy failed to materialize as promised, despite the disclosure in Neufeld's 1957 annual report that the inclusion of some English on Sunday evenings had resulted in little noticeable improvement in attendance. While the review of the use of English in Sunday evening services was delayed, English was becoming more pervasive in the activities of the congregation during the remainder of the week. The winter bulletins of 1957 show a predominance of English in week-day activities and a prominence of youth-related activities. Rather than pointing to a congregation becoming more accommodating on the matter of language, this reflects Pastor Neufeld's concern to improve service to the youth of the congregation.

The autumn of 1957 also brought a development that would ultimately afford the congregation a limited safety valve for the energies of younger outreach oriented members. The loss of the mission Sunday school in early 1952 had reduced the opportunities available to youth for Christian service in English. A new effort was emerging reflecting the fact that a majority of South End members lived on Winnipeg's west side. Demonstrating a high level of constructive spirit, motivation, energy and organization the South End youth launched the Brooklands Sunday School Mission on November 17 with six teachers and fifty children in attendance. Some youth, despite South End's grudging attitude on language accommodation, were willing to remain in the congregation and do their outreach work at arm's

length, both physically and linguistically.

The delay in reviewing the use of English on Sunday evenings ended on March 1, 1958. Without addressing the language issue directly, the Education Committee presented council with a series of ideas for improving the evening services and attracting more children and youth. The council also avoided the language question as it accepted the committee's report in principle, but decided to recommend that Sunday mornings remain German and the evenings be either German or English as the situation required. In April council members devoted ninety minutes to debating the amount of English allowable in worship and the need to attract youth to Sunday evening services.¹² Finally they agreed that there should be "more English." Pastor Neufeld was responsible for determining who would speak in the evening service and in which language, placing him in an impossible position because he was sure to displease someone with every decision. Consideration of a request to replace the Sunday morning *Gebetstunde* with a short English sermon was refused as the council dedicated the bulk of the next membership meeting to the building issue. It appears that some on the council wanted to move further along the road of language transition but were constrained by their more conservative brethren.

Several dynamics were becoming evident in the overall process. Leaders refused to discuss the language issue with the membership. Rather than presenting the membership with a concrete plan for united action on the facilities question, leadership expected the congregation to bear the burden of choice and decision among competing options and rationales. Council members, ministers and deacons all refused to declare their personal positions on the options presented to the members. The result was an increasingly divided congregation.

For almost a year frustration over the facilities issue grew until members revolted, demanding that their leaders declare themselves on the question. When leaders finally spoke out, the language question was back on the agenda. This occurred at a May 21, 1958, meeting when the membership wrestled with three options to solve the shortage of Sunday school space: build

a new facility at a new location, build an addition at the present location or divide the congregation. When the Building Research Committee finally declared itself, it came out in favour of establishing a new English congregation, but not necessarily at the Portage Avenue location. Then the committee also admitted that part of its rationale was that a new English-speaking congregation would help relieve the existing language tension.

Having broached the possibility of a new English congregation, the committee backed away from recommending the Portage Avenue location. Rather, the Building Research Committee hoped that such a new congregation could be established in concert with other Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren congregations, perhaps in the Elmwood-North Kildonan area. The South End English faction was too small, the committee feared, to be financially viable on its own, especially at the remote Portage location, well removed from any other Mennonite Brethren centres. The committee did not mention that the German-bilingual majority at South End would likely refuse any significant financial investment in a predominantly English congregation. Nevertheless, the building question now began to hinge on the *Sprachfrage* and finally the council was asked to prepare a proposal.

The council, however, was as divided as the membership, able only to recommend that the next step be a decision whether or not to divide and establish a second congregation. There was no mention of language and there was no guidance prepared to help the membership with its decision. As Neufeld presented this inconclusive recommendation to the membership the next evening, another long discussion ensued until the meeting was adjourned. Members were encouraged to consider the matter prayerfully and to ask God's forgiveness for not always expressing themselves wisely. When the council met on June 3 new plans were laid for another attempt to force closure on the language-congregational division debate even though the council itself was either unable or unwilling to take a position. A week later, on June 11, council presented the members with a detailed schedule of the advantages and disadvantages of not dividing the

congregation and staying together.¹³ Members were told that division could help the congregation alleviate the language tension by establishing a new English congregation. It was stipulated, however, that the decision to divide or not divide must be made by a 75 per cent majority. After another long discussion, Scripture reading and prayer, the vote was taken. Fifty-nine per cent favoured staying together and 42 per cent favoured dividing.

Obviously the result had fallen short of the required 75 per cent majority, disclosing a badly divided congregation. The proposition that the congregation stay together did not mention language. The background of the decision, however, freighted the results with significant implications for the language issue because at this point it was assumed that a new congregation would be English. When over a third opted for division based on this understanding, the leadership could no longer deny that a significant proportion of the members was dissatisfied with the minimal accommodation of a year earlier. This turn of events placed language at the top of the congregational agenda.

As council wrestled with the split in the congregation language was the most contentious issue. In the summer of 1958 the council presented members with a personalized ballot asking what their position was. Did they want more German, or more English?¹⁴ By September the ballots had apparently come in with sufficient pro-English sentiment to provoke the council to further action. Now the council proposed a second ballot with three questions: Are you in favour of discontinuing the prayer time on Sunday morning in favour of an English sermon? Would you like to belong to a congregation in which the basic language is English? Would you like to belong to a congregation in which the basic language is German?¹⁵ That same day the questions were presented to a membership meeting. The result was that 56 per cent wanted to replace the *Gebetstunde* with an English sermon. Only 11 per cent wanted a church in which English was the principle language but 69 per cent wanted a church with German as the primary language. The validity of the results, however, was undercut by a very high number of abstentions on the last two questions.

The first question showed a most serious division; a bare majority of members were ready to include an English sermon in the Sunday morning order of worship. Furthermore, among those voting, most did not want to be part of a congregation in which the religious language was primarily English. Still, the principle of bilingualism accepted a year earlier had been formally re-affirmed. Confronted with these results, the council remained unable to produce a consensus but also refused to permit any initiative brought by Neufeld to go forward without their unanimous consent. In the face of this frustration, the ordained ministers of the congregation took charge of the discussion themselves. As a result, the council presented the October membership meeting with a motion "that we immediately take steps toward the use of both languages in our public services,"¹⁶ that is, Sunday morning worship would include two sermons, one German and one English. The *Gebetstunde* would be re-scheduled for Wednesday evening, and an effort would be made to enhance the Wednesday evening meeting. Sunday evening services would be German, English or both, according to the demands of the situation. The vote was 275 in favour, 95 against, and only 3 abstentions. Bilingualism had finally been formally extended to the Sunday morning service by 74 per cent of members voting.

The minority opposed to the introduction of English into the Sunday morning service, however, was threatening further protest. Already at the October 9 meeting when the vote was taken, it was necessary to exhort all members to continue to support all activities of the congregation such as the Lord's Supper and membership meetings. It was soon evident that boycotting communion and membership meetings was not the only action being threatened. At the next council meeting, it was rumoured that members resisting the October 9 vote were threatening to organize as a separate congregation.

The November 30 bulletin contained a notice enjoining prayer for the coming annual meetings. It included an interesting note: "Pray for the annual business meeting to be held on Dec. 6th and 7th. Let us prayerfully submit to the Lord's guid-

ance remembering that there is only one perfect will of God concerning every issue.”¹⁷ If one believed there was only “one perfect will of God” regarding the language issue, and if one also came to believe that one’s own position best approximated that perfect divine will, the ability to compromise was severely limited.

The decision to displace the Sunday morning *Gebetstunde* with an English sermon significantly extended South End bilingualism to a new definition of the status quo. This shift had first been rejected in August 1954. When the congregation finally accepted bilingualism in May 1957 it had restricted the use of English to the Sunday evening service. Then, in September 1958, when 56 per cent of the voting members approved the principle of bilingual Sunday morning services, the ministers found the political will to draft a coherent plan, and finally the council recommended the crucial change. Achieving Sunday morning bilingualism, however, offered South End no respite from controversy. Some members threatened to form a purely German congregation; others wanted to form an all-English congregation. Furthermore, the need for Sunday school space was growing relentlessly. All these factors conspired to keep the option of forming a new congregation alive and the South End ministers, in their new more proactive mode, were ready to exploit this possibility as a way of relieving the tension.

Schism

In 1957-58, leadership at first had tried to suppress a connection between the issues of language and facilities but the members refused this separation. Ultimately, this led to a decision not to divide but to extend bilingual services to Sunday morning. Now, leaders tried to exploit continuing but limited interest in mostly or all English worship to create support for a branch congregation that would solve the facilities question. In February 1959 council members agreed unanimously to recommend the establishment of a branch congregation. The detailed

rationale¹⁸ supporting this proposal suggested that it would safeguard congregational unity by solving the language problem, but the language of the new congregation was not specifically stipulated, nor was its location clarified.¹⁹ On March 11, faced with a single proposal and clearly supportive rationale, the membership voted 88 per cent in favour of division, well exceeding the stipulated 75 per cent required to decide the question.²⁰

Agreeing to a branch congregation but not stipulating its location had the effect of identifying a distinct South End faction eager to form a separate English congregation. Within weeks of the decision a group living in south Winnipeg presented the council with a detailed proposal to establish a congregation in the Fort Garry area close to the University of Manitoba. No explicit mention of language appeared in the eight-point rationale but the objectives of the group, that is, to engage in outreach and evangelism and to serve the student population at the University of Manitoba, indicate that the group intended to function primarily in English.²¹ Again, in response to specific alternatives proposed by Neufeld and Peters, the council repudiated the South Winnipeg petition and decided to retain control of the division process. Council and the membership would decide the location and language of the proposed branch group but the new group would also receive substantial financial assistance from the parent congregation. In sum, council intended the new branch to be a united project of the entire South End congregation and not a convenient cover for schism.

Addressing the outstanding questions of language and location, the leadership agreed that the branch congregation should be "primarily English" and that it should locate in a section of the city with no Mennonite Brethren congregation, but where there already were a substantial number of South End members. This formed the basis of a questionnaire designed to identify those interested in the new congregation and to learn where members thought the new work should locate. When the members ratified the council's plan, they were also careful to withhold from the prospective new congregation any promise of financial support until they knew what the financial strength of the

new group itself would be. Between a quarter and a third of the members opted for the new congregation. Overall, the prospect of a new English congregation only captured 27 per cent of the voting members indicating that a substantial majority of South End members, including younger members, seemed satisfied with the new bilingual arrangement for the Sunday morning services, or at least were not ready to declare themselves for a new English congregation.²² The location preference of those showing interest in joining a new congregation was almost equally divided between Fort Garry and Portage Avenue. Faced with this even split between the two alternative locations, the council opted for the property it already owned and agreed to recommend that the new congregation be established on the Portage property. The council quickly prepared another ballot on which members would formally declare their intent to join the new congregation.

When the council asked whether the membership was ready to make the Portage lot available to the new group, 82 per cent agreed. At this point a significant shift occurred in the discussion as it became clear that there actually would be a new congregation established on the Portage Avenue property. The membership now re-opened the question of the linguistic orientation of the new congregation and, in doing so, a fundamental reference point for the previous decision-making process was undercut. After the nature of the new group was discussed at length a motion that the new group be "more English" was lost, 36 to 183. A second motion, that the new congregation be bilingual, carried. This led to a crucial further vote revealing that 100 were choosing the new group and 105 were choosing to remain. Apparently, the previous position that the new group be primarily English had depressed the numbers ready to move to Portage Avenue. As a whole, the congregation now appeared content to continue the policy of bilingualism and was not ready to follow the lead of a smaller group within the membership that wanted to establish an English congregation.

The council continued to follow its plan and on June 14 presented the congregation with its planned second ballot de-

signed to establish the formal membership of the new, now bilingual, congregation. Of 393 ballots, 98 were cast for the new congregation on Portage Avenue while 208 were cast for the "old" congregation. Seventeen were undecided. Stipulating that the new congregation be bilingual had neither increased its size nor altered its make-up. The new group was predominantly from twenty to forty years of age, with forty married couples and eighteen single persons. The number of potential Sunday school students in the new group was seventy-three.

This last statistic is significant because the entire process leading to the establishment of this second congregation had started because of insufficient Sunday school space at the William and Juno location. On the surface it appeared that the problem was in process of being solved by shifting about a quarter of the South End membership into the new bilingual congregation at the Portage Avenue location, and thus relieving the pressure on the William and Juno facilities. When the next step was broached, however, and the council confirmed its intention to organize this group immediately, three council members ominously voted no. The brief period of council solidarity appeared to be over; not everyone was happy with the emerging result.

At the June 24, 1959, inaugural meeting of the branch congregation the membership's previous decision to withhold any promise of financial support for the new congregation stiffened. There was now growing refusal on the part of the parent congregation to lend financial support to the building of the new facility. The fragile consensus in favour of division broke down and in November the membership rescinded its previous decision and voted to remain together 106 to 45. Language was not at issue in this reversal; rather, the majority group who wished to remain at the William and Juno location became less willing to contribute to the building of a new facility from which they themselves would not benefit directly. While the entire process since February 1959 had collapsed, two important language-related dynamics had been brought to the surface. The bilingual majority of the South End congregation was not willing to ap-

prove and sponsor a branch congregation, which might be English. Second, too few of those remaining at William and Juno were willing to help bear a significant proportion of the cost of such a venture, even if it was bilingual.

Now members were forced back to the original issue as it had emerged five years earlier. How could South End accommodate its Sunday school? Would the congregation remain united at William and Juno and build an addition, or move together to the new Portage Avenue location? Even though language was no longer an explicit factor in the decision making-process, the debate was bitter and acrimonious, in part reflecting a renewed and serious lack of unity in the council itself. Nevertheless, on February 17, 1960, the membership finally voted 264 to 148, or almost two to one, in favour of moving to the Portage Avenue location as a whole congregation.

This ambiguous but hard-won agreement was short-lived. Three weeks later, Pastor Neufeld announced to the council that a group of members had served him with a document asking to remain at the William and Juno location. Despite strong pressure from the majority, the dissenting group remained obdurate and on May 3, with great and bitter reluctance, the South End membership voted to legitimate the formation of what became the Central Mennonite Brethren Church. There is no explicit reference to language in the definition of the groups but the linguistic dimensions of the schism must have been evident to all. At the same meeting, the now reduced South End membership decided to contain any further language tension by resolving to maintain the current arrangement of German and English in the services unchanged for three years after which, if needed, the matter might again be addressed.²³

The bitterness of the schism did not issue from language, but appears to have stemmed from the obvious financial implications of having, as it turned out, a third of the members withdraw on the eve of a very major capital outlay and debt acquisition. The resulting ill will produced an unfortunate spate of feuding between the two factions in the course of the negotiations necessary to decide a purchase price for the William and

Juno property, and the division of the congregation's possessions.²⁴ On September 19, 1960, the dissenting members formally organized as a separate congregation and the two congregations co-existed in the same building for over a year until the new Portage Avenue facility was completed in November 1961. The actual magnitude of the schism is seen in the membership figures reported to the Canadian Conference. In 1960 the South End membership was reported at 549. In 1963 after both congregations had finished sorting themselves out, Portage Avenue (formerly South End) had 425 members and Central had 161.

Nowhere in the congregational records is there any reference to the split occurring along linguistic lines, but it appears that those not willing to share in the expense of moving to a new facility were also those most desirous of a unilingual German congregation. It is probable that the seed of this separation was sown as early as November 1958 when a group threatened schism because English was being introduced into the Sunday morning service. There is evidence that the Central congregation was the more staunchly German segment of the original South End membership. The detailed list dividing the assets of the congregation stipulated that the Central congregation would receive 100 German hymnals, but no English. In the year that the two congregations shared the William and Juno facility, they conducted joint Sunday morning worship services. The Central congregation had its own bulletin insert in the South End bulletin, announcing its separate weekday activities and membership meetings. These inserts were thoroughly German including announcements for Central's Monday night family evening. The Central bulletin a decade later in 1970 remained solidly German with even the English Sunday morning sermon announced in German. Congregational minutes were still completely in German in 1982.

In contrast to the Central congregation, there can be no doubt that the original South End congregation thought of itself as bilingual. The 1960 annual Christmas choir program of the South End congregation was printed almost entirely in English and had only three German items, all at the very beginning of the

evening. The time capsule planned for insertion under the Portage Avenue cornerstone gave clear evidence of bilingualism.²⁵ In planning for the dedication, the congregation decided that the evening service would be in English so that people of the Portage Avenue neighbourhood could be invited.

Meanwhile, the Brooklands mission was maturing into more than a Sunday school. After council approval was secured in March 1961, regular Sunday evening services began April 2; these were completely in English and everything, including the preaching, was done by unordained members. In effect, Brooklands was in the process of becoming an English-speaking branch of South End. Thus, while the schism had relieved linguistic tension by removing the staunchly 'German-only' segment, the developing Brooklands work provided a growing outlet for the most *verenglisched* on the South End language spectrum. Even though Brookland's English-speaking work force came from South End, this modest extension could not accommodate the entire pro-English group at South End. Between 1959 and 1961 South End-Portage Avenue's membership dropped by more than 22 per cent. While this decrease is substantially the result of the Central Church schism, it is highly probable that Portage Avenue also contributed its share of members to other English-speaking Mennonite Brethren congregations being formed in Winnipeg, that is, the Fort Rouge congregation in south Winnipeg and later, the River East church in North Kildonan.

In November 1961 the congregation moved into its new church on Portage Avenue and on December 4 Pastor J. P. Neufeld submitted his resignation after having served the congregation as leading minister for ten difficult years. His resignation, which apparently caught the council unawares, was unexplained except that he wanted to devote his time to missions. The suddenness of Neufeld's announcement was underlined by his desire to end his responsibilities by New Year. The council took immediate steps to appoint Mennonite Brethren Bible College faculty member F. C. Peters as interim leader.

Early in January 1962 there were two council meetings

and a membership meeting in the space of five days as interim leader Peters attempted to establish constructive fraternal relations with the Central congregation. Thus, on January 5 the South End membership ratified a conciliatory document requesting forgiveness of the Central congregation where the South End congregation had failed, after which Peters admonished the membership not to discuss the matter any more and the members indicated their agreement by standing. This was conveyed to the Central membership in person by G. Hubert and J. P. Neufeld. When the South End²⁶ congregation met again on January 31, it voted to accept a reciprocal statement of regret and request for forgiveness presented by the Central congregation. Formally at least, the two congregations had been reconciled.

Suppression Fails Again

As a re-forming congregation, South End faced an urgent need to address the vacancy left by Pastor Neufeld. In short order, Henry R. Baerg, a fully bilingual professor at the Bible College, was contacted and affirmed as leader by the membership. He began his responsibilities in March and took up his work full-time in May after the end of the college term. Meanwhile, Baerg's college faculty colleague, F. C. Peters, continued as interim leader.

The winter of 1961-62 began a six-year period of ad hoc language transition. This was the result of the three-year moratorium forbidding discussion of the language question. In 1963 this hardened into a long-term refusal to address the process of language transition in an intentional and orderly fashion. Thus, language was effectively removed from the leadership agenda and the issue was driven underground, as incremental accommodation continued but without formal deliberation or acknowledgment by the council or membership. Only in 1968 did the council resurrect the question that ultimately led to ratification of separate English and German services the next year, but not before the members tried to extend their bilingual status quo yet

again.

Even in the face of denial, the unsettling effect of schism, relocation and reorganization had implications for South End's language profile in 1962. The question could not be avoided. For example, in re-establishing the German school, the congregation gratefully acknowledged a supporting gift of \$200 from the German consulate, and German school chairman N. Neufeld admonished the congregation to promote the German language at home and through the German school. In another instance, the language of planned evangelistic meetings was specifically queried in council leading to the decision that the services should, "if possible" be in German but that they should be led by the spirit of God, and if necessary, change to English.²⁷ The membership overturned this decision stipulating that the evening services in the last week of the series should be in English. In fact, the actual provision for English was very limited. Only the two services on the concluding Sunday were in English, although each evening service did include an English children's feature.

A survey of the bulletins for 1962 reveals a carefully limited bilingualism featuring a German and an English sermon each Sunday morning, and one English hymn and two German hymns. This routine, however, did not preclude the provision of additional English content for special events, and as Pastor Baerg settled into his responsibilities, the English dimension of the bulletin was modestly enhanced. By the end of 1962, after a year in its new facility, the Portage Avenue congregation seemed settled into a stable and comfortable routine and after the years of turmoil and controversy, members seemed determined to keep peace. This impression was reinforced as the language discussion moratorium ended in August 1963, and when members reviewed the agreement, the policy of bilingual services was reaffirmed for an indefinite period. Specifically, members stipulated that there be no time limit set on the bilingual policy.

The next period of years appears to have been very stable linguistically in the church. Change came very slowly in small increments. In October 1963 the English-language Brooklands

extension work began conducting its Sunday school and worship on Sunday mornings. By 1964 Brooklands was constituted as a freestanding English congregation with twelve members. In July 1964 the principal headings in the Portage Avenue bulletins changed to English. From this point on the call to worship was only occasionally printed in German. By autumn, the usual language in the bulletin was English with German being reserved for groups likely to need or demand it. The Sunday morning order of service had also switched to English. In 1965, the annual statistical report of the congregation to the Conference indicated seven classes of German Sunday school in the nursery beginner and primary departments, and three adult classes in German. All else was English. The next year only the three adult German classes remained. By 1966 the occasional council minute was in English when a younger member acted as a substitute secretary, and occasional sensitive motions considered by the secretary to be important enough to record in their exact wording are quoted verbatim in good English. All this indicates that by 1967 the working language of the congregation was largely English while the language of record remained largely German. All these incremental changes occurred without any formal action by either the council or the membership.

These years of apparent linguistic stability ended in 1967 with a series of developments indicating that the status of German in the congregation was declining. In part, the tension lay between outreach and language. The council received a petition from a group of members requesting that the German portion of the service not be shortened or displaced. Vigorous discussion failed to produce a resolution. The difficulty may have resulted from the practice of broadcasting the English portion of the Sunday morning service, by now the central and dominant element, in the Lions Manor senior citizens' home not far from the church. That winter, after a protracted effort, the German school was abandoned. Meanwhile, the council polled the members to "learn how they are thinking" about the "language problem" during the worship services.²⁸ This led to an "exploration committee" consisting of the ministers and deacons. In April, Pastor

Baerg recommended that the children be excused from the thirty minute German portion of the service²⁹ for junior church. The council declined the recommendation.

Discontent was also brewing in the benches. The July 21, 1968, bulletin carried an extraordinary item called a "View from the Pew" written by Sunday school superintendent Walter Regehr. Regehr, a school principal, claimed that bilingual worship was a serious hindrance to the teaching ministry of the church and to systematic Bible exposition. The practice of having two Sunday morning sermons, one English and the other German, reduced the time a preacher had to develop his subject. Listeners were forced to shift their attention from one language and one theme to another precluding the development of a single integrated emphasis through the entire service. Ministers were prevented from working through an extended portion of biblical text on consecutive Sundays to present a connected series of sermons. All this resulted, according to Regehr, in "the burden of teaching in the church [being] placed on the Sunday school, which has then become the main teaching arm of the church."³⁰ This is a rare insight into the kind of case being made for the elimination of bilingual services. The choice was between retention of German on one hand and good spiritual nurture via systematic Bible teaching on the other.

Two weeks later another article appeared, this time over the signature of Jake Suderman, the administrator of Lions Manor. Entitled "The Older Person," it drew attention to the growing proportion of older people in Canadian society and that they were "relegated to an inferior position" in society and in the church. After describing the difficulties faced by older persons, including the problem of communication, he concluded, "Our recent church opinion poll on the language question was extremely meaningful to me, and I think it indicated that we are prepared to keep the lines of communications open to our older people for a little while longer."³¹ This reference to the poll taken earlier that year shows that Suderman, at least, appeared to believe it argued for continued bilingualism. In any case, the two sides of the issue had been aired—a choice between quality

Bible teaching, and the needs of the elderly.

Finally in September, Pastor Baerg was ready to make a concrete recommendation. Speaking to the council he said, "There is unity in our church and a well-rounded program. Now we have to see what we can do to reach the neighbourhood and plan for the future of our children."³² For a three-month trial, he proposed a thirty-minute German service beginning at 9:30, followed in turn by Sunday school and English service. The council agreed to recommend this to the membership for a ballot vote to be held after a "time of quietness and prayer."

Meeting with the members a month later, Baerg explained that while they had a good program of Sunday worship, an effective Wednesday evening program and much to be thankful for, they must also plan for the future. A majority of members, however, disagreed, deciding to stay with the present system because, they said, the recent survey indicated this to be what the vast majority of the members wanted. The membership realized, the minute concluded, that eventually it would have to "go over to the English, but now is not yet the time."³³ By early 1969 relations between some members of the congregation and Pastor Baerg were beginning to deteriorate, leading to his resignation in May.³⁴ By September the congregation called Henry H. Voth, who was also on the Bible College faculty, a member of the Portage Avenue congregation, and a former pastoral assistant to Baerg.

October 20, 1969, marked the first membership meeting documented in English. It also marked the re-opening of the language debate. David Redekopp, now the moderator, described two groups in church. The first, he said, which understood only German, was the more mature and understanding. The other, which understood only English, was younger and more aggressive. This led to a rationale for restructuring the Sunday morning services. A large number of Portage Avenue children and young people did not understand German. By asking them to sit through the German service³⁵ every Sunday morning the congregation was influencing them either to leave the service at the end of the English part, or to develop the habit

of seeking other entertainment while sitting, bored, in the service. Such habits could easily influence their attitude during the English service as well. Furthermore, Portage Avenue was discouraging non-German speaking people from attending. Such people did not like to sit through German services and felt that the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren were too different for them to feel at home in their church.

Redekopp admitted that the German service had often been cut very short when the English service ran overtime. Putting the services into different time frames would actually make more time available for the German service. Not only would separate scheduling of the services enhance the possibilities for English-language outreach, but it would also enable them to invite people who did not speak English to the completely German service and Sunday school. Outreach possibilities would be enhanced in both languages. During the German service there could also be a choir practice for the children, and parents who brought their children to the practice could attend the German service. The purpose of this proposal, he concluded, was to improve and strengthen both the German and the English services and to make them more attractive. Those who understood both languages would be encouraged to attend both services.³⁶

Comments on the proposal were generally favourable, but many members wanted the German service after Sunday school and before the English service, an arrangement that would have minimized the degree of change considerably. Redekopp's proposal was ratified by more than 60 per cent.³⁷ The following February, the membership confirmed the new arrangement 97 to 10.

When the South End-Portage Avenue story is viewed as a whole, several salient features come into focus. South End-Portage Avenue was the youngest of the three congregations studied in this analysis. In the early 1940s, before language transition began, its membership was the most homogenous, and it was also the only congregation to receive a substantial infusion of new German-speaking immigrants after World War II. Its pastoral leadership stands in marked contrast to that of Winkler

and North End-Elmwood because it depended on a person appointed from within and not as well trained professionally for the ministry. Compared to leaders in the other case studies, J. P. Neufeld appears the least aggressive and proactive of all. Like Winkler, South End struggled with the need for additional Christian education facilities.

While the South End split was not really about language, it cannot be understood apart from the linguistic struggle of the congregation. At the same time, factors such as South End's large first generation German immigrant population, its history of internal tension and less than effective leadership, and the constraints of an urban location at the heart of the city, contributed to the process. Given its propensity to congregational tension, language served as the primary lightening rod for much of South End's stress. The attempt to deal with other issues apart from language was clearly unsuccessful until the congregation adopted full bilingualism. Then, as Portage Avenue developed into a more stable congregation, the language question still festered, and the congregation failed in its apparent hope of becoming a long-term bilingual congregation.

Conclusion

The course of language transition produced a fundamental shift in the religious experience within the Mennonite Brethren Church. This can be illustrated by the following vignettes. In 1907 a correspondent to the Russian Mennonite periodical *Friedensstimme* wrote, "If we are conscious of our peoplehood, the use and understanding of the German language is essential. Correct German thinking, correct German feeling, correct German speaking will always be a blessing and also promote correct Christian thinking and action."¹ At the outset of the twentieth century the alliance of the German language and religion – *Deutsch und Religion* – was considered indispensable to the identity of Mennonite Brethren.

A little over a decade later, J. W. Neufeld, a Mennonite Brethren minister in both Canada and the United States, complained in the Mennonite Brethren periodical *Zionsbote* that among first-generation Mennonite Brethren immigrants English had become so mixed with German that it was scarcely recognizable, and the second generation spoke only English. In his opinion, there was no doubt that German would soon be lost, with serious results for Mennonite Brethren faith.²

In 1945, B. B. Janz toured the young adult summer mission efforts of Alberta and shared his reflections with H. F. Klassen.³ Sadly pessimistic, the only certainty Janz saw in the future was the "ruin of all that is good." Unless German could be retained long enough to facilitate a smooth transition to English, he feared inevitable "rupture and pain, misunderstanding and contempt."⁴ *Deutsch und Religion* were seriously at risk.

The June 25, 1952 issue of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, a Canadian Mennonite Brethren paper published in Winnipeg, carried the third installment of an article entitled "*Der Preis der Zweisprachigkeit*" by Isaak Regehr of Coaldale, Al-

An earlier version of this chapter appeared in *Bridging Troubled Waters: The Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century* edited by Paul Toews (Winnipeg, Man.

⁴ Hillsboro, Kans.: Kindred Press, 1995), 247-259. Used by permission.

berta. The plight of the German language, he lamented, was like that of Ishmael in Genesis 21, sent into the desert with Hagar when he seemed to threaten Isaac. In the end, however, God rescued and blessed Ishmael because of Hagar's prayers; in the same way God would also rescue and bless the bilingualism of the Mennonites if they earnestly pled with God.⁵ While some considered German to be an orphaned language, cast aside in favour of English, they still had faith that *Deutsch und Religion* could be restored to its proper status in the Mennonite Brethren ethos.

Nine years later, in 1961, C. C. Peters, British Columbia Bible School teacher and leader of the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church, preached the last full-length defense of the German language to be heard at a Canadian Conference convention. Introducing and concluding his case with Philippians 2:5 and John 17:21 respectively,⁶ he argued that the unity and integrity of the Mennonite Brethren Church depended on the retention of the German language. Within ten years, however, congregations that had worshipped together first in German, and then in German and English, were splitting into separate English and German services.⁷

The Scope and Sequence of Mennonite Brethren Language Transition

The process of Mennonite Brethren integration into North American society brought many changes, some of which were very subtle and beyond the awareness of most Mennonite Brethren members. The threat posed to the alliance of "German and Religion," however, was an immediate and tangible challenge from which there was no easy escape. The steady encroachment of the English language into Mennonite Brethren faith and practice represented a fundamental issue in the church during the mid-twentieth century. This conclusion is based on an analysis of Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference proceedings, Mennonite Brethren-sponsored periodicals such as *Zi-*

onsbote, *Mennonitische Rundschau* and *Das Konferenz Jugendblatt*, and case studies of language transition in three Manitoba congregations during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. The culture Mennonite Brethren brought with them from their former life in southern Russia adapted to Canadian ways in many respects, but they struggled to retain the central role played by the German language in their religious practice and expression. The issue of language continuity or shift became a question of deliberate public policy reaching from the foremost councils of the church to the membership meetings of local congregations. By the 1960s the fight to retain High German as the language of Mennonite Brethren piety and religious practice had ended and the process by which Mennonite Brethren were becoming “*verenglisched*”⁸ was all but complete.

The period of language transition for conference institutions stretched from the 1940s to the mid-1960s. By 1965 English was the official working language of the Canadian Conference and the language of one of the official organs of Canadian Mennonite Brethren. The three congregations used as case studies lagged somewhat behind the Conference but by 1971 all three had converted their main Sunday morning worship services to English. The year 1952 marks a high point of emotional crisis after which the English reality seeded in the youth of the 1930s and 1940s rapidly matured to bear the fruit of complete transition in the 1960s.

Several critical junctures punctuated the period before 1952. Language was a concern of Canadian leaders from the beginning of the conference in 1910. A decade later, however, Canadian Mennonite Brethren (*Kanadier*) who had immigrated to North America in the 1870s appeared ready to begin the transition process along with their American co-religionists. The Canadian process, however, was interrupted in the 1920s as a new wave of German-speakers, the *Russländer*, overwhelmed the *Kanadier*. The newcomers took immediate steps to protect their heritage of *Deutsch und Religion*. Nevertheless, the immigrant *Russländer* failed to convince their children that Mennonite Brethren religion and the German language were a necessary

unity. By 1947 English was becoming a significant fact of religious life among younger Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Their leaders had no choice but to acknowledge that language was becoming a serious problem for the church.

Mennonite Brethren were of different minds regarding German and English from the very beginning of the transitional period. Some saw bilingualism as regrettable but necessary. Believing that an eventual transition was inevitable, they were willing to take steps in that direction. Conversely, others took parallel steps to preserve, strengthen and entrench the German language. Thus, the disruptive and divisive potential of the *Sprachfrage* was evident from the outset. The ready adoption of English by first-generation Canadian *Russländer*, however, doomed the campaign of the German-retainers before it began. This set the stage for twenty years of linguistic tension and painful transition.

The 1950s and 1960s were a period of formal and institutional language change. This period began with the establishment in 1950 of the most obvious symbol of the futile German-retention effort: the Canadian Conference Committee for the Preservation of the German Language. Created as a poor substitute for the failure of Mennonite Brethren schools to mount a coordinated effort at German retention, the committee was most effective at providing systematic documentation of the advance of English. Pro-German rhetoric of the early 1950s revealed the extent to which some identified their Mennonite Brethren faith with their heritage of German language and ethnicity. The German language was the defensive perimeter guarding the integrity of Mennonite Brethren distinctives and identity. Parents who failed to speak High German at home were derelict in their duty. Children and youth who did not make every effort to learn German were one step away from apostasy. Mennonite Brethren leaders who neglected the urgent struggle to retain the German heritage for the church were failing in their God-appointed mandate. Biblical precept and example were exploited for the cause, and the retention of the German language was declared God's absolute will for the Mennonite people.

Against this backdrop, the official record documents the relentless advance of English in those sectors of the church most concerned with children and youth. At the same time, progressive leaders prepared for transition. The *Youth Worker* and the *M.B.S.S. Instructor* were established within two years of the organization of the German Committee. As early as 1945, and increasingly into the 1950s, some Conference leaders saw a subculture of Mennonite Brethren youth adopting English as its language of piety and mission. In response, they produced a series of publications designed to retain the youth for the church and serve the needs of rising English-speaking lay leaders, while also bridging the language gap by incrementally altering the ratio of German to English in their content. Congregational German school activity peaked in 1951 after which it declined to virtual extinction fifteen years later. By 1958 English was being used in more than 95 percent of Sunday schools and youth groups across the Conference. Front-ranking Conference leaders had given up any pretense of protecting a premier status for German among Canadian Mennonite Brethren. During the late 1950s and early 1960s a proposal for an English family-oriented periodical slowly gained acceptance, English and German became equally permissible on the Conference floor, and the Committee for the German Language was disbanded. All these events prepared the way for the final decision in 1965 to make English the official language of the Canadian Conference.

Tracing language transition at the Conference level offers a necessary but limited perspective on the language-related religious experience of Mennonite Brethren in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Detailed analyses of three congregations and their process of language shift also reveal much about the significance language has had for Mennonite Brethren religion. The examination of an originally "*Kanadier* convert" congregation in small-town Winkler and two urban *Russländer*-dominated congregations in Winnipeg - North End/ Elmwood and South End/Portage Avenue - shows a common period of transition that stretches from around 1950 to the late 1960s.

In 1949, as front-ranking Conference leaders were ac-

knowledging the *Sprachfrage*, the Winkler congregation was already using English in Sunday school and youth programs while North End and South End maintained that they were solidly German. In the next three years all three recognized that their children were losing the ability to function in German. Two congregations, Winkler and South End, discussed the need for English in the Sunday morning worship service. Neither, however, took any action—as might be expected at a time when most decision-makers still believed that the German language could and should be salvaged as a permanent feature of Mennonite Brethren experience. By 1955 all three congregations had installed full-time professional pastors and by 1957 all three pastors had initiated Christian education committees in the congregations.

Meanwhile, the North and South End congregations had acknowledged English in the Sunday schools and youth programs. All three congregations had introduced English Sunday evening services as well. In Winkler and North End the youth specifically initiated these, while at South End the admission of English content to the Sunday evening service was an explicit recognition of non-German-speaking youth. Weekday youth programming had become almost totally English. These developments paralleled the transformation of the *Youth Worker* and the *Instructor* into English resources for Christian education.

Allowing an English sermon in Sunday morning worship was a crucial next step. While this innovation cannot be documented for Winkler, in 1958 both Elmwood and South End substituted an English sermon for the traditional *Gebetstunde*. They did so after a two-year process initiated by their respective Christian education committees. Again, the larger Conference process and the congregational process were roughly in step as 1959 saw the publication of an English translation of the *Gesangbuch*, a resource deliberately designed for bilingual worship.

For almost a decade the three congregations practiced bilingual worship, and in each case the transition from bilingual to unilingual English worship proved the most difficult. In Winkler the Christian Education Committee led the process. The mem-

bership came to the very brink of splitting on the issue in 1967 before the bilingual majority capitulated for the sake of preserving the congregation intact. That same year, after a four-year process, Elmwood members reversed a previous rejection of their council's recommendation, and agreed that their main Sunday morning service become totally English. In 1961 South End had divided into the bilingual Portage Avenue and the unilingual German Central congregations. Portage Avenue repeatedly reaffirmed its determination to remain bilingual until 1970 when its members also accepted separate German and English Sunday morning services. In all three cases the final stage of transition occurred immediately after a pastoral resignation and before a new pastor had completely taken over leadership. While pastoral transition probably provided the occasion for the formal transition, it is also true that by 1965 the Canadian Conference had withdrawn nearly all support for German as the primary language of continuing Mennonite Brethren faith and practice. With the Conference now publishing both the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* and the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and giving members their choice of one or the other, the unity of *Deutsch und Religion* had been broken. The decline and virtual extinction of Mennonite Brethren bilingualism was in sight.

The main steps of transition in the three cases are coincident with one another and with the process in the Conference at large. Nevertheless, even though all three congregations were located in Manitoba, and though the leaders and members of these congregations were in frequent contact with each other, the internal transition of each seems self-contained. There is no explicit evidence of one depending upon or borrowing from another. In surveying the three case studies, however, the similarities are more striking than the differences. One might expect that Winkler, with its much longer history and *Kanadier* convert background would have had an easier and earlier transition than North End/Elmwood and South End/Portage Avenue. This was not true, however. Winkler did declare a higher amount of English usage in Sunday school and youth in 1949, and in view of the German instruction available in public school did not have a

congregational German school. It also is impossible to document the onset of bilingual preaching from the congregational records. These, however, are the most significant differences between the rural Winkler and the two urban congregations in Winnipeg.

The commonalities among the three congregations are more striking. Winkler adopted unilingual English worship the same year as Elmwood. Winkler's brush with bitter division was even more clearly language-related than the separation that racked South End/Portage Avenue. All three recognized the language challenge within a few years of each other and almost two decades later completed the process within a four-year span. The process of language confrontation and concrete change followed two significant and related innovations in each case: the introduction of the professional pastorate, and the institutionalization of the needs of children and youth in a Christian Education Committee. In all three instances the pastor specifically introduced the Christian Education Committee and took a pro-English advocacy role on behalf of the younger segment of the congregation. Combining these similarities with the similar chronologies of change followed by each shows that the *Kanadier-Russländer* and urban-rural distinctions did not result in significant differences on their language transition.

This conclusion is further supported by instances where two of the congregations shared a common feature in contrast to the remaining third. In Elmwood and South End youth were engaged in English-language community outreach at the periphery of the congregation well ahead of any significant internal linguistic accommodation. In both cases, members refused to integrate the recipients of these ministries into the mainstream of the congregation. Winkler and South End, the congregations that suffered the most tension, made extensive use of questionnaires to raise the awareness of members and to forge a consensus among them. Elmwood, the congregation that suffered the least overt strife also had the pastor with the longest tenure, I. W. Redekopp (1954-1967). He also was the most skilled and capable pastor, although J. H. Quiring made an effective start in Winkler

(1952-1961). Both came from the ranks of the Bible college faculty, and both tried to implement language transition as a positive program of incremental change. Jacob Neufeld of South End (1950-1961) was not as well trained, was less aggressive by nature and led a congregation with a history of internal tension. As a result he almost collapsed under the strain of trying to meet the needs of a growing English minority while shackled to an unresponsive German majority. Part of the trauma faced by both Elmwood and South End was the difficult choice between an English sermon that would serve as a significant signal of inclusion for the younger segment of the congregation, and the Sunday morning *Gebetstunde* that served as an important participatory experience for older members. Giving up the *Gebetstunde* was a costly concession for the aging German establishment, and having made this sacrifice, it was not soon ready to be segregated from the emerging English majority and relegated to a shorter German service of obviously inferior status.

Factors Contributing to the Language Transition Process

Having outlined the scope and sequence of Mennonite Brethren language transition in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, it remains to identify some key factors that contributed to the transitional process. Because of the nature of the sources informing this analysis, some factors are highlighted at the expense of others. The research relies on internal documents that present the story of language transition from the perspective of two specific groups: denominational and congregational leaders, and Mennonite Brethren who contributed to periodicals. Thus, the voice of most members is heard only through their "yea" or "nay" in the voting process. A study including material from oral sources or sources exterior to the Mennonite Brethren community could reveal other important dynamics. Furthermore, this analysis does not touch the larger and more general factors inherent in the social integration of any immigrant group into a new and different host society. These limitations, however, do not prevent the

disclosure of some internal dynamics that affected the exchange of English for German in the church.

The immigrant experience created the potential dynamic for change. Mennonite Brethren, who with other Mennonites had maintained the unity of religion and High German within a larger Russian-speaking context, now faced a new English-speaking social reality. As immigrants in Canadian society, they did not maintain, in the long term, the linguistic boundaries around their religious experience despite the determined efforts of many to do so. A primary factor in the process relates to education. In Russia Mennonites had largely controlled their own education, but in North America this was impossible.⁹ Mennonite Brethren in the United States confronted the challenge around the turn of the century.¹⁰ After 1910 late *Kanadier* Mennonite Brethren in Canada founded the Herbert Bible School and sought to protect their privilege of extracurricular German religious instruction in the public schools. The fact remains, however, that Mennonite Brethren children were being educated in English and the coming of the *Russländer* did nothing to change this. The Bible schools, the graded German Sunday school curriculum, the congregational German school, all of which received significant impetus with the coming of the *Russländer*, were intended in part to substitute for the German day-school of the Russian Mennonite colonies. They failed, however, to capture Canadian-born Mennonite Brethren children and youth for the German language. As the process advanced, education was also enlisted on the pro-English, pro-transition side of the issue. Whatever some in the constituency hoped, the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, founded in 1944, was bilingual from the beginning. Periodicals such as the *Jugendblatt*, the *Youth Worker* and the *Instructor* all focused on the Christian education of young people. The transition process in the three case studies received significant impetus from Christian education committees. Thus, education ranks as a factor of first importance in Mennonite Brethren language transition.

A second factor promoting transition is related to the first. Mennonite Brethren had a relatively new history as a re-

newal movement among Mennonites and had a soteriology explicitly based on personal conversion. The religious dynamic of their 1860 schism from the *Kirchliche* Mennonites, the predominant Mennonite group in Russia, came from a conviction that authentic Christianity consisted of crisis conversion, occasioned by a profound sense of personal sinfulness, leading to a daily life of ethical purity and public witness, validated by the *Gemeinde* (congregation) in adult baptism and protected by rigorous congregational discipline.¹¹ This religious ideology had several implications for language and religion. When combined with the idealism of youth, it was a powerful motivation for outreach and mission. It also militated against a nominal faith satisfied with formal observance and passive religious allegiances.

Evidence of this religious activism can be found among the youth of both North End/Elmwood and South End. They mounted sizable English extension Sunday schools at arm's length from the congregation and organized other English language ministries, ranging from rescue mission work to tract distribution on the street. Thus, as Mennonite Brethren youth were educated in English and attended Bible schools that drew inspiration from North American revivalism, they moved out into their English-speaking communities. In the process they thoroughly integrated their personal Mennonite Brethren faith with the English language. This was the new reality that dawned on B. B. Janz, minister of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Coaldale, Alberta, in 1945 after a first-hand examination of young-adult summer outreach ministries in Alberta. For Janz the unity of Mennonite Brethren religion and German was ruined. He already feared the possibility of schism and only hoped that a bilingual phase could be extended long enough to avoid it.

This introduces the third factor of language transition, the role of leadership. The failure of German-language educational efforts and the integration of English and practical religion by the youth apparently convinced many front-ranking leaders that bilingualism was, at best, a stress-relieving step on the way to full language transition. Seen in this light, the Canadian Mennonite Brethren purchase of the Christian Press, a printing estab-

lishment in Winnipeg, and the *Mennonitische Rundschau* in 1946 balanced the 1945 introduction of the bilingual *Jugendblatt*. It was, in the words of B. B. Janz, an effort to regulate the situation. The Committee for the Preservation of the German Language served quite well as a safety vent for pro-German rhetoric but it had little effect on the pace of the transition process. H. F. Klassen of the Christian Press that provided the *Mennonitische Rundschau* for Mennonite German enthusiasts, also launched the *Mennonite Observer* in 1955 at a strategic juncture. The leader-driven buy-out of the Press also helped to introduce the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*.

At the local level, most of the pastors recruited from the ranks of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College faculty who served three case-study congregations took progressive steps to promote language transition. Of the case-study pastoral leaders, only D. K. Dürksen of North End took a definite pro-German stance. Hermann Lenzmann of Winkler tried to maintain the bilingual status quo. The remaining pastors all took their own steps to move the process of transition along to a peaceful conclusion. Thus, while many leaders were not militantly pro-English, they viewed transition to English as inevitable. They were unwilling to sacrifice their youth or the unity of their congregations and conference on the altar of German retention. Simultaneously, they struggled to meet the needs of the older generation and preserve as much goodwill as possible on the road to complete transition. There is no doubt that language was one of the most intractable issues facing denominational and congregational leaders in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

If education, mission and outreach, and leadership all tend to explain the advance of language transition, what are the factors that accented the problem in the first place? It is obvious that all non-English speaking immigrant groups to North America face the issue of language transition; the likelihood of a language transition process is inherent in the immigrant experience. In this respect, the Mennonite immigrants to North America in the 1870s were not unique. It would seem that by 1920 many Mennonite pro-German supporters in the United States had all

but given up and the course of language transition among Russian Mennonites was well underway.¹² Mennonite Brethren recognized that their second generation was almost completely English and that the cause of German-speaking Mennonite Brethren faith was virtually lost. By 1929 English content had become a necessity in Sunday school material intended for American Mennonite Brethren. In 1943 English became the official language of the General Conference encompassing both American and Canadian Mennonite Brethren, and ten years later the General Conference published an English hymnal. For North American Mennonite Brethren as a whole, then, the process of language transition seems to have been a generation earlier than for Canadian Mennonite Brethren. This discrepancy points to the delayed unfolding of a language transition process in Canada in contrast to the American Mennonite Brethren.

Without precluding the operation of other factors inherent in the differing American and Canadian contexts, it appears that the immigration of the *Russländer* in the 1920s delayed and profoundly shaped the course of Canadian Mennonite Brethren language transition. The staunchly German-speaking *Russländer* numerically overwhelmed Canadian Mennonite Brethren on the threshold of commencing their language transition in the 1920s and this development delayed the Canadian transition for a generation. The smaller German Mennonite immigration after World War II did not materially slow the pace of transition in the Conference at large, but it probably had some local effect. Thus, it is possible that the segment of the South End congregation that became the German-speaking Central congregation consisted largely of these more recently arrived immigrants. Still, it was the *Russländer* who led the fight to retain the German language. They did so for two major reasons.

First, the German language represented a significant hedge protecting Mennonite Brethren identity and community from the encroaching dangers of English Canadian society. If personal religion and evangelism provided one important aspect of Mennonite Brethren self-understanding, the separate integrity of the congregation, the *Gemeinde*, was another. For Mennonite

Brethren thrown into an alien social environment, the *Gemeinde* represented an ethos of separation from the world. It was the primary social institution providing identity, meaning and purpose in the midst of daily life. For ordinary members, it represented their strongest tie to an increasingly idealized past, and a refuge from the strangeness of their new world. The exclusive use of German in the *Gemeinde* offered a powerful mark of differentiation and a hedge against dangerous assimilation to the ways of what older Mennonite Brethren considered the “barbarians” around them.¹³

South End and Elmwood provide two examples that illustrate this sentiment. In 1952, as the reaction against the creeping encroachment of English was at its peak, the South End congregation voted to end sponsorship of its decade-old English mission Sunday school. South End was unwilling to integrate young English-speaking converts from non-Mennonite backgrounds into its *Gemeinde*. Even more specific is the example of Elmwood in 1965 when members rejected a proposal sponsored jointly by the Good Tidings Sunday School, the Christian Education Committee and the council, to end bilingual worship in favor of segregated worship so that community people could be integrated into an English worship service. The fact that English was already a part of the Elmwood service is very instructive. By 1965 the issue was not the introduction of English, but the retention of German. Mennonite Brethren members were willing to overrule their leaders to retain the German and keep the *Engländer* out.

Secondly, the volatility of the German question for Mennonite Brethren during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s was heightened because at least some members believed that the German language deserved a sacred status. The German language was a natural extension of the chauvinist attitudes many, if not most, *Russländer* immigrants harbored for their adopted German heritage. Thus, German was not only a hedge against worldly corruption but also a positive gift from God to the Mennonite people. It is at this crucial point that the language issue points to the ethnocentricity of Mennonite Brethren religion in this period.

While the evidence is muted in the official record, it is sufficient to validate this important conclusion. In 1949 F. C. Thiessen, a leading Mennonite Brethren educator from British Columbia maintained it was God's will that Mennonite Brethren children should be born into German-speaking families. God did not intend Mennonite Brethren to adopt the English language. At the 1951 Canadian Conference convention David Neuman of the Ontario Youth Committee alluded to the concern of youth that their elders were ethnocentric and not bibliocentric in their faith. Later at the same convention, the German Committee felt constrained to confront the confusion of language and salvation in the first sentence of its initial report to the Conference. In the 1952 *Mennonitische Rundschau* typeface controversy, correspondents used biblical citations to charge editor H. F. Klassen with his responsibility to defend the German language. Isaac Regehr, in his 1952 "Der Preis der Zweisprachigkeit," implied that German was the divinely ordained birthright of the Mennonite people. To reject it was to commit the sin of Esau in selling Isaac's blessing for a mess of pottage. The tendency to make the German language itself central and essential to Mennonite Brethren religion was probably more prevalent among rank and file members than among leaders, but the pain and turmoil of the language transition is at least partly explained by this factor.

One indicator of the significance of language transition for Mennonite Brethren is the varied number of factors that were operant in the process. No single factor is sufficient to understand what happened. Education, mission, leadership, the realities of immigrant life, religious and ethnic separation and a tendency to sacralize one's mother tongue all served to drive the process, illustrating the complex and even contradictory nature of the cultural dynamics at work. The opposing forces set in motion by cultural accommodation and mission on the one hand, and an ideology of separation and cultural superiority on the other, proved so intractable that, in a sense, the fears of schism were finally proven true. A generation after the arrival of the *Russländer*, Mennonite Brethren were compromising their core

value of a bonded congregational unit as congregation after congregation made the painful decision to divide its worshipping community based on linguistic preference. This conclusion alone is sufficient to show that language transition was a highly significant feature of Mennonite Brethren experience. While a painful linguistic divide had indeed been crossed by the 1970s, the divide between old and young and between congregation and community would continue to challenge the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Church.

Sources and Bibliography

Primary Sources

The primary materials under girding this study fall into three main classifications: congregational records, conference proceedings and periodicals. They are all deposited at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The congregational records analyzed for this study originate with the Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church (formerly the North End Mennonite Brethren Church) for the years 1909 to 1970, the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church (formerly the South End Mennonite Brethren Church) for the years 1936-1970 and with the Winkler, Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church (formerly the Burwalde Mennonite Brethren Church) for the years 1888 to 1970. Limited recourse was also taken to several other relevant collections such as the minutes of the Winkler Christian Education Committee.

The practice of distributing weekly congregational bulletins only gained general acceptance in the 1950s. The North End-Elmwood collection is the most complete. Only occasional samples are available for Winkler until the early 1970s. In the case of South End-Portage Avenue, the bulletins were not on deposit at the Centre and were consulted at the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church office.

The annual Conference proceedings are all available. General Conference proceedings were reviewed from 1878 to 1969 and Canadian Conference, formerly the Northern District Conference, records were examined in detail from 1910 to 1965. The statistical information available in the annual Canadian proceedings was augmented by a virtually complete collection of the original handwritten statistical questionnaires submitted by each congregation for the years 1946 to 1966.

Periodicals published by Mennonite Brethren were also surveyed for the time period in question. The *Zionsbote*, pub-

lished by the North American General Conference (was surveyed between 1890 and 1964. The *Mennonitische Rundschau* came under Mennonite Brethren control in 1946 and then at arm's length with specific stipulations that the *Rundschau* did not represent an official denominational publication. Nevertheless, it was published by the Mennonite Brethren-owned Christian Press and edited by a Mennonite Brethren leader, and was surveyed for the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Three Mennonite Brethren publications related to youth and Christian education were begun and ended within the time frame of this analysis. The first of these was the *Das Konferenz-Jugendblatt der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde von Manitoba* (1944-1945) that became the *Konferenz-Jugendblatt der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinden in Canada* (1945-1969), followed by the *M. B. S. S. Instructor* (1951-1962) and *The Young People's Worker* (1952-1953) that was re-titled the *Youth Worker* (1953-1978). Finally, three English Mennonite Brethren periodicals were surveyed for the period under study: the *Christian Leader* (1937-1970), the *Mennonite Observer* (1955-1961) and the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (1962-1970).

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ENDNOTES

Abbreviations used in Endnotes

Canadian Conference Proceedings - Verhandlungen der ... Kanadischen Konferenz der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinden von Nord Amerika; Berichte und Beschluese der ... Kanadischen Konferenz der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinden von Nord Amerika; Minutes of the ... Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America.

CL - The Christian Leader.

CMBS - Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies.

CP - Christian Press.

General Conference Proceedings - Verhandlungen der ... Bundes-Konferenz der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde von Nord-Amerika; Verhandlungen der ... General-Konferenz der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde von Nord Amerika; Yearbook of the ... General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America.

Jugendblatt - Das Konferenz-Jugendblatt der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde von Manitoba and Konferenz-Jugendblatt der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinden in Canada.

MBH - Mennonite Brethren Herald.

MBPH - Mennonite Brethren Publishing House

MO - Mennonite Observer.

MR - Mennonitische Rundschau.

NIV - New International Version.

Northern District Conference Proceedings - Verhandlungen der ... nördlichen Distrikt-Konferenz der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde von Nord-Amerika.

Endnotes

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1 Paul Toews, ed. *Bridging Troubled Waters: The Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century* (Winnipeg, Man. and Hillsboro, Kans.: Kindred Press, 1995), xiv-xv.

2 Annual Statistical Report: Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches for 2000.

3 "Gliederzahl und Namen und Adressen der Prediger und Diakone des Nördlichen Distrikts," in *Verhandlungen der fünften Nördlichen Distrikt-Konferenz der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde von Nord-Amerika. Abgehalten in der Gemeinde zu Winkler, Man. am 22. 23. und 24. Juni, 1914* (Hillsboro, Kans.: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1914), 24-26. This is the first year for which reliable figures are available. Hereafter Mennonite Brethren Publishing House will be designated MBPH.

4 Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada, 1883-1983* (Winnipeg, Man.: Kindred Press, 1987), 11. In 1908 Russian-speaking Mennonite Brethren in Saskatchewan formed their own conference.

5 John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church, Pilgrims and Pioneers*, ed. A. J. Klassen. (Fresno Calif.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 153ff.

6 An introduction to this literature is available in a collection of papers prepared by scholars representing six different disciplines. These were presented and discussed at a May 1986 symposium held at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario, to mark the bi-centenary of Mennonites in Canada. See Calvin Wall Redekop and Samuel J. Steiner, ed., *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: University Press of America, 1988). Calvin Redekop has integrated the discussion of Mennonite identity from a sociological perspective in *Mennonite Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). For an historical treatment in the context of the larger literature see the thesis discussing Germanism and the German language as a factor of socio-religious integration and boundary maintenance for Canadian *Russländer* Mennonite Brethren between 1930 and 1960 by Benjamin Wall Redekop, "The German Identity of Mennonite Brethren Immigrants in Canada, 1930-1960" (M. A. diss., University of British Columbia, 1990).

7 Paul Toews, "Faith in Culture and Culture in Faith: The Mennonite Brethren in North America," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988): 36-50.

8 Jacob Loewen, "The German Language, Culture and Faith." Unpublished paper presented to the study conference, "Dynamics of Faith and Culture in Mennonite Brethren History," Winnipeg, Man., November 14-15, 1986. CMBS, Winnipeg, Man..

9 Ibid., 24.

10 John A. Toews, *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 14.

11 Loewen, "The German Language, Culture and Faith," 24.

12 John H. Redekop, *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren* (Hillsboro, Kans. and Winnipeg, Man.: Kindred Press, 1987).

13 Ibid., 112.

14 Ibid., 113.

15 Ibid., 153.

16 This symposium, held November 16-21, 1987, in Fresno, California, heard a series of papers on the subject by ten different scholars representing a full spectrum of disciplines. These are published in "Faith and Ethnicity," *Direction* 17 (Spring 1988).

17 Leo Driedger, *The Ethnic Factor: Identity in Diversity*, McGraw-Hill Ryerson Series in Canadian Sociology (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1989), 13, 177..

18 See John De Vries, "Ethnic Language Maintenance and Shift," in *Ethnic Demography: Canadian Immigrant, Racial and Cultural Variations*, ed. Shiva S. Halli, Frank Trovato and Leo Driedger (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), 163-177.

19 The question of Mennonite Brethren female participation in membership meetings awaits detailed investigation. The present research discovered a reasonably well-documented dispute over female suffrage in the Winkler congregation, but no similar controversy was evident in either of the other two case studies.

CHAPTER TWO. PROLOGUE TO CONFRONTATION

1 Abe Dueck outlines this threefold differentiation in "Kanadier, Amerikaner and Russländer: Patterns of Fragmentation Among North American Mennonite Brethren Churches" in the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 19 (2001): 180-194. With respect to Canadian Mennonite Brethren before the 1920s, Dueck offers two distinctions. There are the "Kanadier converts," that is, *Kanadier* who became Mennonite Brethren in Canada, and "late *Kanadier*," who were *Amerikaner* Mennonite Brethren who began migrating to Saskatchewan in the late 1890s.

2 In North America, the Mennonite Brethren organized themselves into a General Conference in 1879. John A. Toews, *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 138. This designation should not be confused with the name of the other major group of Russian Mennonites in Canada, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and at the time of this publication is named Mennonite Church Canada.

3 See note number one.

4 John A. Toews, *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 217.

5 See glossary.

6 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a*

Separate People (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), 340.

7 Ibid., 350ff..

8 By 1910, the General Conference decided to meet triennially and districts were organized regionally to attend to local affairs, leading to the formation of the Northern District Conference. This later became the Canadian Conference with the exception of the Minnesota and Dakota congregations that became part of the Central District Conference of the US conference of the Mennonite Brethren.

9 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1912), 11-15.

10 Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length*, 14.

11 See glossary.

12 Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length*, 4.

13 "Belehrendes: Wert der deutsche Sprache," *Zionsbote* (Hillsboro, Kans.), May 20, 1914, 7. "Belehrendes" is carries the meaning of "cautionary advice." The subtitle translates as "The Value of the German Language."

14 J. W. Neufeld, "Etwas zum Nachdenken," *Zionsbote* (Hillsboro, Kans.), September 15, 1920, 13-14.

15 *Northern District Proceedings* (1921), 28.

16 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), 139.

17 E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen and Sons, 1955), 212.

18 Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, Kans.: The Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1950), 192.

19 Statistical data has been compiled from Conference yearbooks and annual statistical reports. See bibliographic essay.

20 Benjamin Redekop, "The German Identity of Mennonite Brethren Immigrants in Canada, 1930-1960," (M. A. diss., University of British Columbia, 1990), 6.

21 Sunday school was a relatively recent innovation among Mennonites. The Baptist, August Liebig had introduced the Chortitza Colony Mennonite Brethren to Sunday school in 1871 just before the first migration began. Thus, the idea had little time to take root before the 1870s migrants left for America. In the United States, the first Mennonite Brethren Sunday school dates from 1888, about fifteen years after their arrival. Mennonite Brethren were slow to admit that in North America the congregation could no longer rely on day school education to provide for the religious and linguistic nurture of its children. Compared to the potential of the day school for supplying religious education, the Sunday school seemed a very inadequate substitute. Abraham J. Becker, in his 1899 exhortation to retain the German language as essential to Mennonite Brethren tradition and unity, omits the congregation and the Sunday school from his list of vital teaching agencies. Abraham J. Becker, "Die Deutsche Sprache," *Zionsbote* (Hillsboro, Kans.), July 12, 1899,

3.

22 Evidence of concern regarding the use of English among American Mennonite Brethren comes from a 1929 speech delivered by T. A. Nickel to the *Jugendverein* of the Shafter, California congregation and later printed in the *Zionsbote*. T. R. Nickel, "Warum sollten wir die deutsche Sprache aufrecht erhalten?" *Zionsbote* (Hillsboro, Kans.), April 10, 1929, 9-10.

23 See glossary.

24 A. H. Unruh, *Lektionsheft für Schüler von 9 bis 12 Jahren Oktober, November und Dezember 1937*, (1937), 2.

25 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1938), 19-20.

26 P. H. Berg, of the Hillsboro Press, explained that American congregations had already realized that the only hope of retaining unity among themselves lay in providing English materials for their youth. *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1939), 18.

27 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1939), 44-48. The report of the committee was based on a questionnaire distributed to the Canadian congregation.

28 A. A. Kroeker was an instructor at the Winkler Bible School and an avid Sunday school enthusiast.

29 Margaret Epp, *Proclaim Jubilee!* (n. p., [1976]), 27.

30 The Winkler Bible School was originally called the Mennonite Bible School Pniel.

31 Margaret Epp, *Proclaim Jubilee!* 44. Benjamin Redekop documents that in 1939-49 there was a distinct tension between the "intense interest" in German by Bethany students being reported by the faculty and what they were actually experiencing in the classroom. Redekop, "The German Identity of Mennonite Brethren Immigrants in Canada, 1930-1960," 125. It is likely that the student report by Epp is closer to the actual situation.

32 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1935), 48.

33 "Der Lehrplan der Bibelschule," *Auskunft ueber die Winkler Bibelschule "Pniel" 1941-42* (n. p.: 1941), 5, 7-9.

34 *General Conference Proceedings* (1933), 48.

35 *General Conference Proceedings* (1936), 35-40, 39.

36 *CL*, (April 1937), 2.

37 *General Conference Proceedings* (1939), 18.

38 A. B. Voth, Letter printed in "What our Readers Say," *CL*, (July 1937), 22.

39 I. H. Voth (Mrs.), Letter printed in "What our Readers Say," *CL*, (April 1938), 25-26.

40 D. J. Siemens, Letter printed in "What our Readers Say," *CL*, (June 1938), 26.

41 Jake S. Adrian (Mr. and Mrs.), Letter printed in "What our Readers Say," *CL*, (November 1940), 22.

42 Benjamin Wall Redekop has provided a very helpful analysis of the

1930s in his study of the attitude of Mennonite Brethren to National Socialism. He concludes that, despite clear and widely spread pro-Nazi sympathies, Mennonite Brethren ultimately rejected Nazi doctrine with its emphasis on *Volk* but clung to their faith in the superiority of German culture. One dimension of this debate was the repeated argument that the German language was essential to the survival of the Mennonites as a people. Redekop's most telling example is Mennonite Brethren statesman B. B. Janz who explicitly denied that Germanism was essential to Mennonite Brethren Christianity but who also confessed his conviction that "those who bow to the inevitable and give up the German language are traitors to their home, church, and their precious German Bibles." There is no hint in the official record that this debate was going on. Redekop, "The German Identity of Mennonite Brethren Immigrants," 45-78; citation, 68. See also John B. Toews, *With Courage to Spare: The Life of B. B. Janz (1877-1964)* (Winnipeg Man.: The Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America, 1978), 93-98 and James Urry's forthcoming work, "Polarization and Partisanship: Winnipeg (1921 - 1980)" in *Mennonite Peoplehood and Politics in Russia, the Soviet Union and Canada (1880-1980)*.

43 B. B. Janz, "Aus andern Provinzen," *Jugendblatt*, (March 1945), 13.

44 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1954), 14.

45 Adolf Ens, "Changes in Language and Cultural Symbols During the 1950's," presented at the *Symposium on Mennonites in Canada in the 1950's: From People of God to Citizens of the World?* Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ont., May 12-14, 1988, 2. Photocopied.

46 Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length*, 32-33.

47 Neither the war itself, nor any anti-German sentiment connected to it, is mentioned in the Conference records of the debate over language beginning in the 1940s.

48 P. J. D., "Gospel Tidings—the First M. B. Radio Program in Canada," *Jugendblatt*, (April, 1950 - April 1951), 16.

49 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1941), 32-33.

50 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1943), 37, 39.

51 *Ibid.*, 39-40.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1941), 43.

54 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1942), 35-40.

55 The English phrase actually appears in the minute, printed in Gothic.

56 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1943), 32-35.

57 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1944), 24-27.

58 *Ibid.*, 32-33.

59 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1942), 12.

60 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1943), 20.

61 *Ibid.*, 17.

62 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1944), 32-33. Unruh had also been one of the founders of the Winkler Bible School.

63 *Ibid.*, 87-88.

64 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1946), 98-105.

65 Toews reported that in the year 1945-46, the language of instruction in theology, Bible and Christian education had been divided to provide forty-six semester hours in English and thirty-one semester hours in German. In addition, six semester hours of instruction were provided in German, four semester hours in English, eight semester hours in Greek, and four semester hours in French. With respect to music, theory was being taught in English, singing in English and German.

66 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1946), 109.

67 *Ibid.*, 115-117.

68 J. B. Toews, *JB: The Autobiography of a Twentieth-Century Mennonite Pilgrim* (Fresno Calif.: CMBS, 1995) 135ff..

69 H. F. Klassen, "Wie können wir etwas für die Jugend tun?" *Jugendblatt*, (31 May 1944), 2-4. In English the title of the article reads, "How can we do something for the youth?"

70 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1944), 85.

71 *Northern District Conference Proceedings* (1945), 105-106.

72 *Jugendblatt*, II (March 1946).

73 H. F. Klassen, "Fragen und Antworten," *Jugendblatt*, (September 1944), 3.

74 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1946), 74.

75 *General Conference Proceedings* (1957), 61. The *Rundschau* is still published by the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches at the time of this writing.

76 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1946), 75.

77 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1947), 141.

78 *Ibid.*, 156-157.

79 *Ibid.*, 177.

CHAPTER THREE. CONFRONTATION ENGAGED

1 The young peoples' meetings of the North Kildonan, Winnipeg congregation had become almost completely English during the war. As the group was suddenly swelled by non-English-speaking newcomers, the program reverted to German almost overnight. Fred Epp, Private conversation with the author, 22 May 1991, Concord College, Winnipeg, Man..

2 See table 4.2, "Canadian and Mennonite immigration, 1947-51," in T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*, vol. 3, *Mennonites in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 94.

3 "Brief an Editor u. Hilfseditoren," *Jugendblatt*, (February 1947), 2. Under a German heading, the first paragraph appeared in English and the

second in German. The German p reads, "Nun, bitte nichts für ungut. Wir lieben das Konferenz-Jugendblatt und wissen, dass es so nach Wunsch der Konferenz redigiert wird. Hoffen auch, dass es mit der Zeit wirklich der Jugend dienen wird." It is not known if this is how the letter was first written, or if Klassen translated one or the other paragraph for publication, although one can discern signs of German syntax in the English portion. Editor Klassen added a note saying that because this excerpt was taken from a private letter, he had withheld the name of its author. The remainder of the editorial page is in English.

4 A. H., "Eine Antwort auf den 'Brief an Editor u. Hilfseditoren', im Konferenz-Jugendblatt vom Februar 1947, Seite 2," *Jugendblatt*, (April 1947), 2.

5 Translation: "How does one attain love and sympathy for one's mother tongue?"

6 Anna Wiebe, "Wie erzielt man Liebe und Verständnis für die Muttersprache?" *Jugendblatt*, (June 1947), 6-7. German original: "Aus dem Vorhergehenden sehen wir, dass das Heim und die Erziehung in demselben eine entscheidende Rolle spielen in der Erlangung oder Nichterlangung dieser Liebe zu unserer Muttersprache."

7 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1950), 90-91.

8 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1948), 118.

9 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1949), 54-58.

10 *Ibid.*, 57-8.

11 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1950), 90-91.

12. It cannot be established whether these two writers, J. J. Janzen and Gerhard Cornies, were Mennonite Brethren or General Conference Mennonites. Nevertheless, if Janzen and Cornies were not Mennonite Brethren, they certainly seem to be writing in a mode agreeable to some Mennonite Brethren and were published without prejudice in the Mennonite Brethren owned *Rundschau*.

13 Janzen uses the word "Christian" but "Mennonite" is supplied in brackets. It is clear in the German original that Janzen did not distinguish between "Christian" and "Mennonite," nor between the "world" and people of non-Mennonite religious faith.

14 J. J. Janzen, "Mennonitische Tugenden," *MR* (April 12, 1950), 4.

15 Gerhard Cornies, "Rettet die Muttersprache," *MR* (June 21, 1950), 7; (June 27, 1950), 2. Gerhard Cornies may have been a direct descendant of Johann Cornies, a Mennonite entrepreneur of southern Russia. An unsigned genealogy titled "Johann Cornies, 1789-1848" is held at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, Man.. It indicates that Gerhard Cornies was born 26 December 1895 and arrived in Leamington, Ontario in 1948.

16 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1948), 77.

17 Quoted in Margaret Epp, *Proclaim Jubilee!* 14.

18 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1950), 6-7.

19 The German original reads, "Wir sind als Komitee wohl bewusst dass eine Sprache nicht selig macht." *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1951), 58.

20 Committee member H. Regehr was also the Conference statistician and member of the Conference executive.

21 All quotations from the English Bible are in the New International Version.

22 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1951), 12.

23 *M. B. S. S. Instructor*, (January - February [1952]).

24 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1952), 11.

25 *Ibid.*, 161.

26 Isaak Regehr emigrated to Canada from southern Russia in 1926 at age 34. He had been trained as a teacher and had received some university education. In Canada Regehr pursued this profession in Saskatchewan before moving to Coaldale where he farmed and then worked as a bookkeeper in the local hospital. "In Memoriam: Isaac I. Regehr," *MBH* (November 18, 1983), 31.

27 Isaak Regehr, "Sonabendeschule der Coaldale M. B. Gemeinde," *MR* (May 21, 1952), 2.

28 Translation: "The Price of Bilingualism."

29 Isaak Regehr, "Der Preis der Zweisprachigkeit," *MR* (June 11, 1952), 4; (June 18, 1952), 2-3; (June 25, 1952), 3.

30 Isaak Regehr, "Der Preis der Zweisprachigkeit," *MR* (June 11, 1952), 4.

31 Regehr is alluding to I Samuel 12 where Israel rejects God as its sole sovereign, chooses a king and is warned by Samuel that this king will demand its children. The allegorical implication Regehr is making is obvious.

32 P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, rev. ed. trans. J. B. Toews, Abraham Friesen, Peter J. Klassen and Harry Loewen (Fresno Calif.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980) 979-981.

33 The allusion is to Genesis 21.

34 Regehr uses this term despite his emphasis on a unilingual German Mennonite Brethren Church.

35 "Wir haben einen guten Kampf gekaempft," *MR* (October 17, 1951), 6. Herzer had been a German-speaking representative of the Canada Colonization Association of Winnipeg who had assisted the Mennonite Brethren originally get settled on land in the Coaldale area. *Fiftieth Anniversary of the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church* (Calgary, Alberta: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1976), 6.

36 Fred Peters, *MR* (March 26, 1952), 14.

37 *Ibid.*

38 J. D. Unger, *MR* (April 9, 1952), 11.

- 39 N. L., *MR* (April 9, 1952), 11.
- 40 K. K., *MR* (April 9, 1952), 11.
- 41 Anna Janzen, *MR* (April 23, 1952), 15.
- 42 Katharina Shartner, *MR* (April 9, 1952), 11.
- 43 P. B. "Latein oder Gotik," *MR* (April 30, 1952), 6.
- 44 Johann J. Kröker, *MR* (May 7, 1952), 6.
- 45 J. Janzen, "Prüfet aber Alles," *MR* (May 21, 1952), 3.
- 46 H. F. Klassen, *MR* (June 4, 1952), 6.
- 47 G. H. Peters, Wilhelm Enns, Walter Quiring and H. F. Klassen, "Ein Vorschlag," *MR* (March 5, 1952), 6. The four leaders were G. H. Peters, Springstein, Man.; Wilhelm Enns, Springstein, Man.; Walter Quiring, Winnipeg and H. F. Klassen, Winnipeg.
- 48 Translation: "Society for the Cultivation of the German Mother Tongue in Canada."
- 49 "Pflege der deutschen Muttersprache," *MR* (October 15, 1952), 3, 6.
- 50 "*Verenglisched*" was a term applied to Mennonites who seemed to have "gone over to the English." It carried a decidedly negative, and even derisive, connotation.

CHAPTER FOUR. HOPE, DISILLUSIONMENT AND SURRENDER

- 1 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1962), 162-163.
- 2 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1963), 117-118, 119.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 4 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1964), 120.
- 5 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1952), 94-95.
- 6 Statistical Records of the Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America: 1946-1966. CMBS, Winnipeg, Man., call number B340, boxes 19-21. The survey was taken of ten congregations selected on the basis of age, size and location. They were: Yarrow and South Abbotsford, B. C.; Coaldale, Alta.; Herbert and Hepburn, Sask.; Winkler, North End-Elmwood Winnipeg, and South End-Portage Avenue Winnipeg, Man.; Kitchener and Vineland, Ont.. There were approximately ninety statistical items surveyed for each congregation over the twenty-year period ranging from demographic data to items related to language and religious education.
- 7 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1952), 44.
- 8 Translation: Mennonite Society for the German Mother Tongue."
- 9 "Deutsche Muttersprache," *MR* (April 15, 1953), 6. Membership figures were reported in the Mennonitische Rundschau.
- 10 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1954), 97-98.
- 11 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1956), 136.
- 12 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1954), 14.
- 13 See John B. Toews' discussion of Janz' attitudes concerning the language issue in *With Courage to Spare: The Life of B. B. Janz (1877-1964)*

(Winnipeg, Man.: The Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America, 1978), 98-105.

14 Gesangbuchkomitee der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde von Nord-Amerika, editors and compilers. *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde* (Winnipeg, Man.: Bundeskonferenz der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde von Nord-Amerika, 1952).

15 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1954), 69.

16 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1955), 100.

17 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1957), 105.

18 D. J. Pankratz, Foreword to *The Hymn Book: English Edition of the "Gesangbuch" of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Canada* edited and published by the Mennonite Brethren Hymn Book Committee ([Winnipeg, Man.: Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America], 1959), iii.

19 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1954), 107.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1955), 139.

22 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1956), 139. The denominations Regehr enumerated were Evangelical Mennonite Brethren [United Missionary Church], Conference of Mennonites, Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, Brudertaler, Baptists, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Plymouth Brethren, Evangelical Free Church, Lutherans, United Church of Canada and the Presbyterians.

23 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1956), 10.

24 H. F. Klassen, "Mennonite Observer," *MO* (September 21, 1955), 2.

25 "No Ostrich Policy," *MO* (September 21, 1955), 2.

26 Walter Neufeld, "Through the Looking Glass: A Statement of the Problem," *MO* (November 11, 1955), 2.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

29 Frank C. Peters and Heinrich Regehr, ed., *Beschluesse und Empfehlungen der Kanadischen Konferenz der Mennoniten-Brudergemeinden—1910-1960* (Winnipeg, Man.: CP, 1961), 197.

30 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1957), 68-69. At this point Conference agencies produced four different publications: the *Jugendblatt* and the *Youth Worker* of the youth committee, the *Sunday School Instructor* of the Sunday school committee, and the *Voice* of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College.

31 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1957), 69-70.

32 *Ibid.*, 94-95.

33 *Ibid.*, 95.

34 All this while, the *Observer* had continued to appear in English and the other Mennonite Brethren periodicals were becoming totally English.

During 1958 only one German item had appeared in the *Youth Worker* and the last German *Youth Worker* item appeared in February 1959. The *M. B. S. S. Instructor* was completely in English already in 1958.

35 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1959), 194.

36 *Ibid.*, 195.

37 *General Conference Proceedings* (1960), 84, 114-5.

38 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1961), 208, 229.

39 Wiebe, a native of Coaldale and graduate of Mennonite Brethren Bible College, went on to become a well-known Canadian author of books such as *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962).

40 "Prospectus," *MBH* (January 19, 1962), 4.

41 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1963), 117.

42 M. F. "Religion und Sprache," *MR* (December 8, 1954), 2.

43 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1955), 13.

44 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1959), 129-132.

45 The text runs to five pages in the proceedings. *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1961), 145-151.

46 Philippians 2:5.

47 *Canadian Conference Proceedings* (1962), 162.

CHAPTER FIVE. WINKLER CASE STUDY

1 B. B. Janz, "Aus andern Provinzen," *Jugendblatt*, (March 1945), 13.

2 The particulars of the Winkler case study focus primarily on the concluding phase of language transition, that is, the ultimate confrontation over Sunday morning worship. The language changeover in the Sunday school was largely complete before 1940 and is treated as a given in the present analysis. As for the transition from unilingual German to bilingual Sunday morning worship, the Winkler record provides little information about this important phase and it is impossible to document how it developed.

3 Mennonite Brethren in Canada generally did not have a professional or salaried clergy until the 1950s. Ministers and deacons, invariably male, were ordained for life and were regarded as the leading elders of the congregation. These constituted a council that wielded considerable influence but was balanced by the *Gemeinde*, or congregation, which discussed and ratified most major initiatives taken by the council.

4 Weekly Sunday evening services, in addition to *Jugendverein* programs, were not yet part of the regular church routine.

5 Translation: "But we preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23, NIV).

6 The Bible passages specifically consulted were Romans 16:1-3, 6, 12; Philippians 4:2 & 3; 1 Corinthians 11:3-5; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; and Titus 2:3-5. The 1 Corinthians 14 passage was specially underlined in the minute. The minute also notes the acknowledgment that most other congregations in the Conference probably did allow the female vote, although it was also thought many women did not take advantage of this.

7 Although the motion carried with seven in favour and four against with four abstentions, it was decided not to bring the matter before the congregation.

8 The arguments presented clearly show the two competing perspectives on council. Those in favour were that the Conference constitution recommended women be allowed to vote and most Mennonite Brethren congregations were following this recommendation. Other arguments used in favour of the female vote was to "win the youth" and that the congregation must "adjust to the times." Contrary arguments were that women, according to the Bible, must be silent in church. According to the order of creation, women had been placed in a subordinate position. And finally, the Mennonite brotherhood has always conducted itself without the female vote.

9 *Mennonite Brethren Church: Winkler, Manitoba 1888-1963* (n. p.), 18.

10 Winkler Council Minutes, October 5, 1964.

11 Winkler Membership Minutes, June 21, 1965.

12 The new constitution provided for a new council structure calling for only three automatic counselors: the leader-pastor, the assistant leader and the congregational secretary. To these were added twelve members (It was assumed these would be males.) elected at large on rotating three-year terms.

13 Of the sixteen council members present, nine voted in favour, none opposed, but seven abstained. Either some leaders refused to study the problem; or they were denying that a problem existed. In any case, pressure for language reform was now strong enough to override the weighting of abstentions against any disturbance of the status quo.

14 Winkler Membership Minutes, June 21, 1965.

15 The count was twenty-two votes against the amendment, thirteen for it, and eight abstentions.

16 Twenty-eight voted for the motion, thirteen against, and two members abstained. It appears that there was a solid group of thirteen pro-English members present who were voting as a block. There were forty-three members voting members present; these comprised 26 per cent of the total 1965 membership of 327.

17 Winkler Membership Minutes, November 22, 1965.

18 Winkler Membership Minutes, February 7, 1966.

19 The other three options were to alter the present building, build an education wing, or take recourse to "outside facilities" referring to the neighbouring Winkler Bible Institute.

20 Winkler Christian Education Minutes, January 12, 1967.

21 Winkler Council Minutes, March 30, 1967.

22 Winkler Membership Minutes, April 11, 1967.

23 Winkler Membership Minutes, May 12, 1967.

24 The minute does not clarify which previous vote is meant, the show of hands blessing the separating group, or the ballot vote on the principle issue.

25 That is, to remain bilingual, and approve the separation of the English group.

26 Specifically, the plan called for a 9:30 to 10:00 o'clock German service in the sanctuary, English Sunday school in the church basement and German Sunday school in the sanctuary between 10:05 and 11:00 o'clock, followed by an English service from 11:05 to 12:00 noon.

27 The reference is to the convening of the Jerusalem council.

28 Winkler Membership Minutes, March 3, 1969.

29 Winkler Council Minutes, March 3, 1969.

30 Winkler Council Minutes, March 9, 1969.

31 The German text from Matthew 5:24-25 reads, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." The English text, James 5:16, is "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

32 Winkler Membership Minutes, March 9, 1969.

CHAPTER SIX. NORTH-END ELMWOOD CASE STUDY

1 Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg, Man.: Kindred Press, 1990), 19ff..

2 William Neufeld, *From Faith to Faith: The Story of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church* (Winnipeg, Man.: Kindred Press, 1989), 36.

3 Catherine Klassen, "Early History of North End and Elmwood MB Church," June 19, 1988. CMBS, Winnipeg, Man..

4 *25th Anniversary of the Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church: 1953-1978* (n. p.), 4.

5 J. B. Doerksen, "Bericht der Deutschen Schule" in *1932 Jahres-Bericht der M. B. Gemeinde Winnipeg, Manitoba*. CMBS, Winnipeg, Man..

6 Mrs. Ben Horch, "Report of the Y.G.I.C.S. Club" in *1932 Jahres-Bericht der M. B. Gemeinde Winnipeg, Manitoba*. CMBS, Winnipeg, Man..

7 The aims DeFehr enumerated were: 1. That our children learn the German language, which is dear and valuable to us. That they are able to follow German worship so that we are able, in peace, young and old together, to continue to conduct our worship in our mother tongue. 2. To instruct the children in God's Word. 3. To win the children for Christ so that they learn to love the Saviour. 4. That the children learn to love our congregations and our people. 5. To prepare them for our Mennonite Brethren high school where much is taught in the German language.

8 J. Wedel, "Report on Sunday School in 1952." CMBS, Winnipeg, Man..

9 Literally, "Die muessen all angesprochen werden." *25th Anniversary of the Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church: 1953-1978* (n. p.), 4.

10 Elmwood Council Minutes, June 7, 1954. Elmwood Membership Minutes, June 10, 1954.

11 Elmwood Council Minutes, September 13, 1956.

12 The Gebetstunde was a segment of extemporaneous prayer routinely conducted partway through the Sunday morning order of worship. Fast argued that comparatively few in the congregation were able to pray during this time. Furthermore, it was difficult to hear and understand people's prayers standing as they were, widely dispersed around the large auditorium.

13 Elmwood Council Minutes, January 16, 1957.

14 The next year, 166 children, aged four to fifteen, were registered and average attendance stood at sixty.

15 In the same period the congregation reported nineteen members transferring to non-Mennonite Brethren congregations.

16 Elmwood Membership Minutes, December 6, 1959.

17 This attendance represents 55 per cent of Elmwood's potential. Subject to the limitations of the data reported for 1954-1958, it appears this 1959 attendance was the best since the high of 82 per cent in 1952. The next three years show a steady decline.

18 Elmwood Membership Minutes, December 6, 1959.

19 Ibid. The record of this episode has been strongly edited and probably revised at the reading of the minutes at the subsequent meeting. It appears that Redekopp gave the membership an opportunity to suggest his resignation and the congregation declined.

20 The vitality of the Good Tidings Sunday School might indicate equal vigour in the subcongregation, but Good Tidings teachers tended to be Bible college students, not necessarily long-term members of Elmwood. By 1959 Redekopp was relying heavily on senior college students for the English Sunday morning sermon.

21 Elmwood Membership Minutes, December 12, 1960.

22 *Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church Sunday Bulletin*, September 30, 1962.

23 *Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church Sunday Bulletin*, July 2, 1961.

24 Translation: "Prayer by several brethren."

25 The minute does not stipulate whether this was the German group, or the English group, but probably the German group is meant. The minute has been amended by hand but it implies that the council discussed the possibility of changing the entire service to English with the exception of the German sermon. It appears that this was the proposal that Redekopp was to bring to the German Bible study. The diminished status of German in the congregation is betrayed by the assumption that the Wednesday German Bible study, probably dominated by older members, ministers and deacons, would serve as a good test group to ascertain pro-German sentiment.

26 Elmwood Membership Minutes, February 17, 1965.

27 By now, some of the community were prepared to view Elmwood as

their church as indicated by the fact that during the year the mother of one of the students had died and the funeral had been conducted from the Elmwood church.

28 Elmwood Membership Minutes, September 23, 1965.

29 Ibid.

30 Elmwood Council Minutes, January 16, 1967.

31 The six and a half page typed, double-spaced letter is appended to the council minutes of May 5.

32 The opening paragraph sets the occasion and tone: "Im Zusammenhang mit der Suche nach einem Gemeindeleiter moechte ich einige Gedanken zum Ausdruck bringen, die der Herr mir aufs Herze gelegt hat und die mich in letzter Zeit schwerstens beschaeftigt und mir manche schlaflose Stunde der Nacht bereitet haben. Ich moechte die Gemeinde nun in aller Demut fragen, ob sie gewillt ist, mich anzuhoeren." Elmwood Council Minutes, May 5, 1967.

33 Community extension Sunday school from other Winnipeg congregations had by this time matured into two small English Mennonite Brethren congregations, one located in Winnipeg's south end and the other on the west side of Winnipeg.

34 By this time incremental language transition had advanced to the point that the bilingual Sunday morning service was the only remaining offence to the pro-English segment. A brochure prepared for the Interfaith Centennial Committee and a special Elmwood open house commemorating the Canadian Centennial reads, "Our church operates bilingually (on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings); other meetings are in the English language." CMBS, Winnipeg, Man., call number BC-522.

CHAPTER SEVEN. SOUTH-END PORTAGE AVENUE CASE STUDY

1 "History of the Portage Avenue MB Church," *Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church 1967* (n. p.), 47.

2 There were seventy-one students reported in the regular Sunday school and twelve to fifteen in attendance at the Monday evening boys' club. The next year attendance rose sharply for one year and then started to decrease steadily to a low in 1947.

3 *Jugendblatt*, (May 31, 1944), 6.

4 Walter E. Janzen, "Report on the Logan Ave. Mission Sunday School," *Jugendblatt*, (January-April, 1953), 24.

5 South End Membership Minutes, December 6, 1947.

6 This particular seems to support the argument made in chapter three, that is, that despite the post-war influx, 1952 was the watershed year in Mennonite Brethren language transition.

7 South End Council Minutes, March 28, 1949.

8 The Logan Avenue Gospel Light Mission was two years away from becoming the Gospel Light Mennonite Brethren Church, the first Winnipeg

congregation to conduct services entirely in English. William Neufeld, *From Faith to Faith: The History of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church* (Winnipeg, Man.: Kindred Press, 1989), 59.

9 South End Membership Minutes, January 24, 1952.

10 The voting results were: have an English sermon on one Sunday evening a month and a German sermon on another - 41 votes; alternate German and English every other Sunday evening - 48 votes; use both languages every Sunday evening - 111 votes. There is no record of abstentions or the number of members present. South End Membership Minutes, May 29, 1957.

11 South End Membership Minutes, September 25, 1957; South End Council Minutes, October 5, 1957.

12 South End Council Minutes, April 22, 1958.

13 This choice probably represented nothing more than a natural tendency to define an issue in terms of the status quo. From the perspective of the council the advantages of staying together were the following: The division of families would be avoided. The financial burden on each individual member would be less in a larger congregation. A larger congregation, as a rule, had greater influence and a larger selection of workers. The external division could cause an inner rupture, and a division could be a negative hindrance for the neighbourhood. The disadvantages included the belief that two smaller congregations would each be easier for the leadership to serve and lead. The language problem might be somewhat easier to resolve because one congregation could use more English and the other more German. If the division were to occur voluntarily, members would not have as far to travel. A division would give more people an opportunity to serve. Two smaller congregations, located in different sectors of the city, would grow more easily than a single larger congregation at a single location and thus, division would create a new opportunity in the city to spread the church's influence.

14 South End Council Minutes, July 22, 1958.

15 South End Council Minutes, September 2, 1958.

16 South End Membership Minutes, October 9, 1958.

17 *South End Mennonite Brethren Church Sunday Morning Bulletin*, November 30, 1958.

18 The rationale reads as follows in translation: "We as church council believe that it is time that we as South End congregation establish a branch congregation for the following reasons: 1. There is insufficient opportunity for all to be working and involved. 2. We are unable to proceed with our building plan in our present facility even though our Sunday school needs additional space. 3. Personal-work is not possible to do well when the congregation is so large. 4. The leader is unable to provide oversight for such a large congregation in its present condition. 5. Having branches in areas of the city where we are not yet present would foster a mission mind-set. 6. If a

branch congregation were established, a by-product might be that the unity of the congregation would be preserved, in as much as we assume that thereby the language problem would be solved." South End Council Minutes, March 2, 1959.

19 One reason for not addressing the location of the new congregation was continuing ambiguity about the status of the Portage property. The "problem" apparently was that in the press of controversy and the confusion of language and facility issues, the membership had never formally sanctioned the purchase of the Portage Lot, and it seems that some members at least were objecting to the price of the purchase and the projected cost of either moving the congregation to this location or building a new branch congregation on such expensive real estate. A "fact-finding" (This is one of the first English loan-words encountered in the minutes.) committee was named, charged with the task of investigating the problem of the Portage Avenue lot and seeing if there were other lots available on Portage Avenue which would also be suitable.

20 The actual vote was 311 votes cast in favour and 44 against. South End Membership Minutes, March 11, 1959.

21 Writing in German, the proposal's authors said the petition was being presented in view of the "present situation" in the congregation and the decision to establish a branch congregation. They claimed to represent an "initiative-group" consisting of South End members resident in south Winnipeg and Fort Garry who believed it was time to establish a Mennonite Brethren congregation in south Winnipeg. They wanted the council to address this question and the possibility of eventually establishing such a congregation. They were not, they said, pursuing this course lightly, but rather in the conviction that this was an opportunity to build the Kingdom of God in a section of the city not yet being served by a Mennonite Brethren congregation. Thus, they offered an eight-point rationale for the council to consider. First of all, they believed that such a congregation would definitely be viable. There already was a significant number of South End members in south Winnipeg to ensure this, and the trend of South End members moving into south Winnipeg was also already well established and well-known. Furthermore, the establishment of a congregation in south Winnipeg would open a large field for evangelism and mission work. Not only this, but such a congregation would be very convenient for rural South End members living south, south-east and south-west of Winnipeg proper. In addition, the number of Mennonite students at the University of Manitoba was growing annually. Such a congregation would furnish a better opportunity to reach out to and care for these students. Building a branch congregation would relieve the shortage of space at the present site for the present, and costs would probably not be an obstacle. A "pastor" could be engaged "part-time," and facilities could even, at first, be rented. There were many possibilities. The proven success of other Mennonite congregations in this section of the city

encouraged the group to proceed with their petition. Finally, the group members believed this step could be directed of God and asked their fellow-members to test this proposal earnestly and make it a matter of prayer, even as the group already had. The document was not signed and no names were given. The council members were each asked to take the matter "into their closet" and entrust the matter to God. The English loan words indicated in the above description are actually used in the document. South End Council Minutes, April 6, 1959.

22 The distribution of votes by area of residence suggests a reason why. Fully a third of the voting membership lived in the downtown area around William and Juno. Many of these would have been less affluent, younger, and also more elderly, families not able to escape to the more upscale areas west, south and northeast as more of the better established middle aged families were able to do. Presented with the option of travelling out to a new English congregation or remaining in a closer, more convenient bilingual congregation, they made their choice.

23 South End Membership Minutes, May 3, 1960.

24 A special vote was even needed to determine which group would get the communion table. The South End members voted 53 to 34 not to take it along. South End Membership Minutes, March 16, 1961.

25 The South End members decided to place a time capsule under the cornerstone of the new building containing a membership list, an excerpt of the minute documenting the decision to build a new church, a German and an English Bible, a German, English and Low German message, a *Mennonitische Rundschau* and a *Mennonite Observer* in which reports concerning the new church had appeared, and a Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith.

26 The South End congregation did not immediately change its name upon moving to the Portage Avenue location. The South End Mennonite Brethren Church only became the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church in June 1962.

27 South End Council Minutes, January 4, 1962.

28 Portage Avenue Council Minutes, January 19, 1968.

29 The entire service was eighty minutes long, beginning at 10:40 and lasting until noon.

30 *Portage Avenue Sunday Morning Bulletin*, July 21, 1968.

31 *Portage Avenue Sunday Morning Bulletin*, August 4, 1968.

32 Portage Avenue Council Minutes, September 30, 1968.

33 Portage Avenue Membership Minutes, October 7, 1968.

34 Portage Avenue Membership Minutes, May 25, 1969. The record gives no indication that the resignation was language related, but Baerg had been building toward his October 1968 proposal for some time. The pattern of having such initiatives rejected, followed by a pastoral resignation, followed again by additional language accommodation in the context of

pastoral change has already been observed in Winkler and Elmwood.

35 It seems Portage Avenue thought in terms of two services, one English and the other German following one after the other in the same time frame.

36 The proposal itself called for a thirty-minute German service slated for 9:30 a. m.. It would include one or two hymns sung by the congregation, a special number sung by a choir especially formed for the German service, and a German message. During this time the children would be gathered into one or more choirs to practice. Sunday school would commence at ten o'clock, and the English service would begin at eleven.

37 The essential change was approved with 131 for, 40 against and 7 abstentions. The three-month trial was endorsed 102 to 58. Portage Avenue Membership Minutes, October 29, 1969.

CHAPTER EIGHT. CONCLUSION

1 Quoted in John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1982), 41.

2 J. W. Neufeld, "Etwas zum Nachdenken," *Zionsbote*, 15 Sept. 1920, 13-14.

3 B. B. Janz, "Aus andern Provinzen," *Jugendblatt*, (March 1945), 13.

4 This English phrase hardly captures the power of the German "*Bruch und Schmerz, Verkenennung und Verachtung*."

5 Isaak Regehr, "Der Preis der Zweisprachigkeit," *MR*, 25 June 1952, 3.

6 Philippians 2:5 and John 17:21 read as follows: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" and "That all of them may be, one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (NIV).

7 The Winkler, Manitoba and Elmwood (Winnipeg, Manitoba) congregations ratified separate English and German services in 1967 and the Portage Avenue congregation in Winnipeg did the same in 1970.

8 This was a derisive term applied by the German-retainers to their co-religionists who were too easily abandoning their German heritage of language and culture for English.

9 The role of education in the cultural retention of Canadian Mennonites has been presented in a paper by Frank H. Epp, "Educational Institutions and Cultural Retention in Canada: The Mennonite Experience," paper presented at the Canadian Historical Society, London, Ont., 1 June 1978.

10 The earliest and most deliberate attempt by American Mennonite Brethren to mount an education-based resistance to English assimilation was their short-lived sponsorship of the German department at McPherson (Kans.) College in the late 1890s. P. F. Durksen, "Deutsches Department in McPherson College, McPherson, Kansas," *Zionsbote*, 8 June 1898, 2.

11 Calvin Redekop has summarized the importance of the congregation in understanding the Mennonite ethos. Redekop, *Mennonite Society*

(Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 62-65.

12 James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America 1880-1930*, The Mennonite Experience in America, ed. Theron F. Schlabach, vol. 3 (Waterloo Ont.: Herald Press, 1989), 221.

13 A general overview of the importance of the Mennonite Brethren *Gemeinde* and the German language in the context of cultural assimilation between 1930 and 1960 is supplied by Benjamin Redekop in a chapter entitled "Germanism and Brethren Congregational Life: The Struggle for Socio-Religious Integrity." Redekop, "The German Identity," 115-161.

GLOSSARY

- Amerikaner*: Mennonite Brethren who emigrated from Russia to the United States in the 1870s and subsequently to Canada, especially Saskatchewan.
- Deutsch und Religion*: Literally, "German and religion." This expression conveyed the idea of a mutually supportive and desirable blending of the German language including the culture that was thought to go with it and Mennonite religion.
- Engländer*: A designation Mennonites used for all English-speaking people regardless of their national or religious background.
- Gebetstunde*: A segment of time in the worship service dedicated to congregational prayer.
- Gemeinde*: A term often translated as "congregation" or "church" but also carrying the meaning of a "covenant community" or a "covenant fellowship." The term can denote both the local congregation and the association of local congregations into a conference of congregations.
- Gesangbuchkomitee*: Hymnal committee.
- Jugendarbeit*: Youth work.
- Jugendblatt*: A bilingual youth oriented periodical beginning in the 1940s, first published in Manitoba as *Das Konferenz-Jugendblatt der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde von Manitoba* and then published by the Northern District Conference Youth Committee as the *Jugendblatt*.
- Jugendfreund*: A German language youth periodical published by the Christian Press of Winnipeg. The name translates as the "friend of the youth."
- Jugendverein*: Young People's Society.
- Kanadier*: Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to Canada in the 1870s.
- Landessprache*: The national language, or the language of the land.
- Lektionsheft*: The name of the General Conference Sunday school manual, meaning "lesson work-book."

Mennonitische Rundschau: A German-language weekly originally published in Elkhart, Indiana (1880-1908) and Scottdale, Pennsylvania (1908-1923). It was purchased by Mennonite Brethren Hermann H. Neufeld and moved to Winnipeg in 1923. A group of Mennonite Brethren leaders purchased the majority of shares in 1946 and by 1960 the Canadian Conference became the sole owner.

Nähverein: A sewing circle, or society.

Ortsgemeinden: Smaller congregations scattered in localities not far from a 'parent' church.

Russländer: Russian Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren, who emigrated to Canada in the 1920s.

Seelsorge: Literally, "soul-care" or pastoral care.

Sprachfrage: The "language question" or the "language issue."

Stadtmission: City or urban mission.

Umgangssprache: The language of everyday life and its activities.

Verein: A society or local group coming together for a common purpose.

Verenglisched: A somewhat scornful or derisive term meaning "to have become anglicized," or "to have gone over to the English."

Wehrlosigkeit: Nonresistance or pacifism.

Zionsbote: The *Zionsbote* was the weekly periodical of North American Mennonite Brethren founded in 1884.

Zweisprachigkeit: Bilingualism.



About the Author

Gerald Ediger has taught courses in the history of Christianity for more than a decade at Mennonite Brethren Bible College, Concord College and Canadian Mennonite University. He has served in the Mennonite Brethren Church and in the wider community in teaching, camp ministry, the pastorate and in conference leadership. He holds degrees from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (M.Ed.), Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (M.Div.) and Toronto School of Theology (Th.D.). He and his wife Carol are members of the McIvor Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg where they make their home.